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## Obituary

**Rev. John N. Schumacher SJ,  
1927–2014**

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# Obituary

## Rev. John N. Schumacher SJ, 1927–2014

Fr. John N. Schumacher SJ died on 14 May 2014, thirty-four days short of his 87th birthday. Born in Buffalo, New York, on 17 June 1927, Father Schumacher entered the Society of Jesus on 30 July 1944, arriving in the Philippines four years later to undertake philosophical studies at the Sacred Heart Novitiate. From 1951 to 1954 he taught English and Latin and served as Prefect of Discipline at the Sacred Heart Novitiate. He returned to the United States to pursue Theology at Woodstock College. He was ordained to the priesthood on 22 June 1957. Fascinated by Rizal, he went on to pursue a doctorate at Georgetown University. He returned to the Philippines in 1964 and became part of the pioneer faculty of the Loyola House of Studies, which would become the Loyola School of Theology, where he devoted over forty years to impart church history to generations of Jesuits, seminarians, and students. Father Jack, as he was known, took his oath as a Filipino citizen in 1977. In 1998, on the centenary of Philippine independence, he received the Ateneo de Manila University's *Gawad Tanglaw ng Lahi*.



The demise of Fr. John N. Schumacher SJ marks the passing of a generation of postwar Filipino historians who established the contours of a new national history anchored in the events of the revolution. Teodoro Agoncillo fired the first salvo in 1956 with *Revolt of the Masses*, followed by *Malolos* (1960). Cesar Majul followed with *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (1957) and two books about Apolinario Mabini (1960, 1964). By 1970 the radical, Marxist-inspired readings of the revolution, which had been brewing for the past two decades, were brought together and popularized in Renato Constantino's *A Past Revisited*. At this point, Schumacher joined the fray with a book on the Propaganda Movement (1972). But his decisive intervention in the field of Philippine Revolution studies would come in 1981 with his monumental *Revolutionary Clergy: The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement, 1850–1903*.

The Agoncillo, Majul, and Constantino histories are not dissimilar in displaying the cumulative results of the nationalist challenge to the colonial and clerical histories that had dominated up to the 1950s. One notices in them, for example, a conscious marginalization of the role of Catholic priests and popular religiosity in the struggle against colonial rule. While the former are ignored, signs of the latter are mocked as “superstitious mumbo jumbo”—to quote Constantino. The overall effect is that of making the “secular” Filipino style of revolutionary struggle unique in Southeast Asia, where Buddhist pongyi and Muslim ulama provided leadership in anticolonial movements. *Revolutionary Clergy* realigned the Philippines with the rest of the region. Surely, writes Schumacher, the majority of Filipinos did not, with the revolution and the republic, simply abandon their loyalty to the Church of Rome. With the imprisonment and departure of the majority of friars during the Katipunan uprising and the republican period, Filipino priests rapidly filled the vacuum. To Schumacher, it was this element that truly represented the sentiments of the masses. The ups and downs of the republic, the guerrilla struggle, and the accommodation to the United States could be traced to what these priests were thinking and doing, and their relationship to the revolutionary and colonial regimes.

Contrary to Agoncillo's widely accepted view that antifriar sentiment was the underlying cause of the popular unrest in 1896, for Schumacher “the mass of ordinary people were grieved by the loss of their friar parish priests” and “were repelled, even horrified, at the idea of the friars being held

prisoners.” The republican government was rent apart, he insisted, by struggles between the anticlericals and “devout Catholics,” and not between the “haves and have nots,” as Agoncillo would have it. Despite their differences, however, both historians agreed that the main social contradiction in the revolution was between the super rich, educated, urban dwelling, weak-kneed *ilustrados*, and the revolutionary masses led by the *principalía*. Schumacher fine-tuned this picture by showing that the *ilustrados* were anticlerical as well, and by counting native priests among the revolutionary leaders from the *principalía* class.

To Constantino’s emphasis on economic and class underpinnings of thinking and behavior, Schumacher responded with intricate discussions of individual motives and “crises of conscience,” deliberately muting questions of social class and corresponding ideology. To the social historians who explained the turmoil of the republican era in terms of factional, regional, and class conflicts, he offered the alternative view that “devoutness” could cut across such lines. He subordinated issues of “collaboration” and “capitulation” to that of church unity. And while he meticulously demonstrated how priests could be a revolutionary force, the ultimate question for him was how the church could survive the “excesses” of revolutionary turmoil.

Father Schumacher may appear to be the odd man out among the pioneers in Philippine Revolution studies, but in fact he was an integral part of this generation. As with the others, his views might be debated, torn apart, and even supplanted, but he would already have transformed our understanding of the complex revolution that lies at the core of our national history. We mourn the loss of this great historian who loved both the Catholic Church and the Filipino nation, with all the tensions and paradoxes that accompany this coupling.

#### **Reynaldo C. Ileto**

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**F**ather Jack was my professor at the Ateneo de Manila in the mid-1970s. He really was a very forward-looking and engaged historian, who had a keen sense of the larger social and political implications of his work. Along with William Henry Scott, he saw historical studies as a way of combatting the Marcos dictatorship. He was terribly affected by Scott’s incarceration. While members of the History Department at the University of the Philippines were engaging in critical collaboration with the Marcos regime, Father Jack was consistently critical of the regime’s abuses and violence. Quick to grasp the significance of Reynaldo Ileto’s work, he was one of its earliest advocates when it was still a dissertation. Inspired by Ileto, Father Jack wrote his *Revolutionary Clergy*, one of the most underrated studies in Philippine historiography.

Father Jack also rode the early wave of social history in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and his lectures on the eighteenth century, a very understudied period, were always riveting and rigorous. Sure, he was suspicious and skeptical of new theoretical approaches, and he was certainly very critical of my work in part because he could not get through the language. But he always provided the necessary reality check, keeping me and many younger historians grounded in the sources. Above all, he taught me, and many of his students, the hardest thing to convey to anyone: a critical sensibility dedicated to using historical studies to demystify sweeping pronouncements on truth and authoritarian claims to power. This was as much the product of his Jesuit training as it was a response to the tumult of the times. In that sense, he was as important as Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino; and really his contributions should be seen as important elaborations, but also pointed correctives to their claims.

#### **Vicente L. Rafael**

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On learning of the death of Fr. John N. Schumacher SJ, my mind went back to the first time I read *The Propaganda Movement* in 1987. I recalled the excitement of being drawn into the intellectual and political history of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I was also deeply impressed by the writing itself, which Fr. Miguel Bernad had described as characterized by a “splendid clarity.” Schumacher was a historian’s historian—of another time, to be sure. His prose was marked by a confident voice and a passion for his subject, though he would likely not agree to use that word if it suggested bias. The confidence came from a mastery of sources he had scrupulously researched. Years of extensive archival research in the US, Spain, and the Philippines gave him deep and prolonged access to documents that few historians before or since have had.

Schumacher’s 1981 book, *Revolutionary Clergy: The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement, 1850–1903*, was no less path breaking, though arguably more controversial. Most histories of the revolution viewed the clergy of the nineteenth century as poorly educated and backward looking. Even those exceptional figures who challenged Spanish authority were regarded as having secondary roles behind those of the better-recognized revolutionary leaders. Schumacher saw the clergy very differently. For him they were not only victims of 1872, but were also “the ones 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 others, even when it was betrayed or abandoned by many of its leaders” (268). *Revolutionary Clergy* deepened and broadened the historiography of the revolution in other ways as well: by drawing on the records of different ecclesiastical provinces, Schumacher shifted the axis so that the perspective on events was widened to include provinces around the country.

Much of Schumacher’s work directly investigated and argued about the place of the Catholic Church in the anticolonial movement and in the emerging nation-state of the Philippines. He was also deeply concerned with Catholicism in Filipino society. In the corpus of his works these issues are intertwined. By interrogating the historical record, he seemed to be asking Catholics, lay and religious alike, to come to terms with what had gone wrong in the past, and to do so by patiently evaluating the evidence. In a 2010 interview for this journal he spoke directly to the necessity of educating

the church itself to its past: “I think the lack of understanding of the history of the Philippine church on the part of churchmen is a negative factor. That’s why I’ve always given a lot of emphasis to my *Readings in Philippine Church History*.”

By the early 1990s I was able to appreciate Schumacher’s work better, as well as this enduring question of how an institution’s own “culture” was defining of its action in the world outside its own. My own life path has taken me away from continuous research on the Philippines but my affection for it and the debt I owe Father Schumacher remain undiminished. The integrity, dedication, and passion that Schumacher brought to his work continue to inspire.

**Coeli Barry**

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The Department of History mourns the passing away of Fr. John N. Schumacher SJ, one of the most prominent historians of the Philippines, who taught at the department for twelve years and, even after his departure, continued to influence a great number of students, colleagues, fellow historians, and academics in the Philippines and beyond.

Father Schumacher was instrumental in reconceptualizing the 1-unit Rizal course into a 3-unit subject, “Rizal and the Emergence of the Philippine Nation,” that generations of students at the Ateneo de Manila would take and which still forms part of the current core curriculum. He was one of those who facilitated the integration of Philippine History into the Ateneo curriculum, and was responsible for the institutionalization of a number of history subjects that the department still offers to its majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He mentored many history graduate students who eventually became prominent historians themselves. His published works on the Propaganda Movement, Philippine nationalism, Philippine church history, and José Rizal continue to be standard readings that have influenced generations of students and historians at the Ateneo de Manila.

Beyond the Ateneo, Father Schumacher was also well known by students, researchers, and historians of Philippine history. His book *The Propaganda Movement, 1880–1895: The Creators of a Filipino Consciousness, the Makers of the Revolution* (1973, revised 1997) was, right from its publication, already a classic tome in understanding the reform movement in Europe and the Philippines. The publication of *Revolutionary Clergy: The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement, 1850–1903* in 1981 was influential in clarifying earlier formulations about the secularization movement, the Philippine Revolution, and the Aglipayan movement. At the time when new theoretical formulations on the nation were coming in vogue, his collection of essays in *The Making of a Nation: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Filipino Nationalism* (1991) historicized a number of theoretical and ideological issues, reminding historians about the need for sound methodology and grounded historical research before being immersed in impassioned debates. These and his many other books and articles had a significant impact in shaping the current trends and contours of modern Philippine historiography.

Naturalized as a Filipino citizen at the height of martial law in 1977—at a time when a number of Filipinos were already leaving the country to become citizens of other states for political and economic considerations—Father Schumacher proved that Filipino nationalism could very well be advanced even by those who were not born Filipinos, but had developed emotional attachment and the sense of affection, even scholarly and academic appreciation, for the nation's history, society, and culture. More than the legal acquisition of Filipino citizenship, Father Schumacher was more Filipino than other natural-born citizens for his keen sense of Filipino historical perspective and his grounding in the society he chose to live with.

We remember him in our prayers, even as we mourn the loss of a major pillar of modern Philippine historiography, whose life and scholarship were constantly dedicated to the service of God and the nation.

**Francis A. Gealogo**

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On a clear and bright summer morn cooled by tall and leafy Philippine mahoganies, Jesuit historian Fr. John N. Schumacher SJ was peacefully laid to rest in the Sacred Heart Novitiate Cemetery, a month before his 87th birthday. His tomb is beside that of Fr. Horacio de la Costa SJ and not far from where his friend and high school classmate, Fr. Joe Smith, had been buried only a few days earlier. Fr. Antonio de Castro SJ refers to these good friends as “two exemplars of that holiness of mind that characterizes true Jesuit scholars.”

Perhaps only a handful of people can lay claim to what may be said of Father Schumacher: both his followers and critics alike admire him as an eminent scholar, an indefatigable researcher, a rigorous mentor. He taught for a total of thirty-five years at the Department of History of the Ateneo de Manila University and at the Loyola School of Theology (LST), becoming Professor Emeritus of the LST in 2000. Along the way he published articles and books that became recognized references in the fields of Philippine and church history, among them, *Revolutionary Clergy* (1981), *Readings in Philippine Church History* (2d ed. 1987), *Making of a Nation* (1991), and *Father Jose Burgos* (1999).

Even in retirement Father Schumacher found time to review manuscripts and advise those who went to him for help on their own projects, ensuring that the work of the younger generation would somehow be imbued with his brand of assiduous scholarship.

Without the good fortune of being his student, I nevertheless had the great privilege of working with him, the Ateneo Press having been his favorite publisher. Indeed, Father Schumacher was a publisher's dream: no query about dates or facts was too petty for his painstaking checking and validation. He did not hesitate to point out errors or admit to them if they were his, and sought opportunities to correct them. He knew exactly where needed references could be found, short of telling us which library shelf they were on. It was such a joy to have encountered a man whose waking hours were wholly devoted to a life of the mind.

His last book, *Growth and Decline: Essays on Philippine Church* (2009), is a compilation of essays, some previously published in journals. Nevertheless, he organized them to cover close to four hundred years of Philippine church history. While he would be the first to say that they by no means present a complete account of the Philippine church, they tackle

and highlight the key factors of events and people and important aspects that have formed that history.

Of this title, and perhaps as a way to sum up the quality of Father Schumacher's labors, Fr. Rene Javellana SJ, in the *Catholic Historical Review* states, "In these essays, he presents a nuanced and well thought-out writing of history, avoiding simplistic generalizations and reflecting knowledge that have occurred over time and space. . . The book shows the caliber of Schumacher's scholarly work, characterized by a critical reading of documentary sources as well as an examination of assumptions, conclusions, and generalizations of historians—including his own."

The Ateneo de Manila University recognized him as its Tanglaw ng Lahi awardee in 1998 for devoting "more than a lifetime to sound scholarship and historical research . . . in a country he has chosen to be his own. The fruits of his labor have helped many Filipinos attain a richer and more profound appreciation of their nation's heritage." In 2011, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award given by the Catholic Mass Media Awards.

For all his brilliance and stature and utter dedication to his lofty calling, Father Schumacher remained a down-to-earth human being—succumbing to the complications of aging, faithfully keeping close touch with family halfway across the world, doing his best to nurture friendships with both his equals and those of us lesser mortals, quietly showing kindnesses in ways he could.

Thank you, dear Father Jack. May you be resting well among your friends in that peaceful place, where the sun shines bright and birds sing among leaves that dance in the breeze.

**Maricor M. Baytion**

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**T**his journal has lost a faithful and indefatigable contributor whose first article appeared in 1954, when *Philippine Studies* was only on its second year of publication. Fifty-seven years and thirty-five article contributions later, Father Schumacher's last two articles appeared in 2011: in vol. 59, no. 1, he wrote his final piece on the Cavite Mutiny, concluding boldly that it was a failed separatist revolution, but the three executed priests had nothing to do with it; in vol. 59, no. 4, he presented Horacio de la Costa's view of Rizal as

an outstanding moral figure in contrast to the Catholic Church hierarchy's predominantly negative and highly defensive stance in the face of the 1956 Rizal Bill.

From 1975 to 1978 he served as the journal's chief editor. Over the years, as the journal went through different phases of growth, expansion, contraction, and revival, Father Schumacher stood beside it and walked with it, nurturing it with his articles, commentaries, and book reviews, the last totaling sixty in all. It was not hard to work with him as an author. He knew by heart the house style of this journal and was meticulously compliant, even with what other historians might consider an unusual way of referencing archival documents. Where he erred he willingly accepted correction. He was always open to change—except for the shift to endnotes. For his "Burgos *Manifesto*" that took up the entire issue no. 2 of vol. 54 (2006), this journal made an exception to what was then being standardized as the journal's style and gave in to his request to revert to footnotes. When his subsequent articles appeared in this journal, he was resigned to the use of endnotes.

Father Schumacher was a valuable member of this journal's pool of referees. He did not hesitate to read and evaluate manuscripts while he had the strength to do so. In October 2013 when, due to three falls and other health problems, he returned a manuscript he had agreed to read, he did so "with great embarrassment" and was profusely apologetic. Otherwise he was always willing to help with journal work, just as he was generous with helping so many others who sought his scholarly reading of their works. He was quick to send a congratulatory email whenever he read an issue that appealed to him, especially when it featured the work of young historians.

Father Schumacher was a man of deep commitment. He was totally dedicated to his craft as a historian, a field he discovered in response to a call for American Jesuits to come to the Philippines in the immediate postwar period. Fascinated by José Rizal and genuinely interested in the man, Father Schumacher also found in Rizal the pivot to explore and study issues in Philippine history *and* church history. Not only did he make important contributions to Philippine historiography, illuminating the "Propaganda Movement" and popularizing the term among others, but he also sought to understand the history of the Catholic Church in the Philippines particularly in the nineteenth century. In the process he unmasked the mistakes and even the corruption by ecclesiastical officials, which compromised the church and its mission in the world. In this light Father Schumacher became the

foremost historian who analyzed nineteenth-century church history with a critical perspective. In 1967 he wrote in a book review, “One who has real faith will not fear that the Church may be hurt by the truth, and the Church is greater than any ecclesiastical official.” His goal was to ensure that the church would learn from past mistakes and not repeat them, hence the compelling need for honesty in narrating the past.

At the same time, he wanted the positive actions of the church and its ministers to be recognized and to provide the contemporary clergy with concrete cases to think through as they considered their own engagement with society. In this regard, as Fr. Antonio de Castro SJ underscored in his homily during the funeral mass on 17 May 2014, “Father Jack taught us that it was possible to love both Church and Nation.” On the pages of *Revolutionary Clergy* Father Schumacher provided complex portraits of Filipino priests who were at the vortex of the nationalist struggles at the close of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth century. The book’s publication in 1981 was also Father Schumacher’s voice urging the church to stand up to Marcos’s martial law regime with its abuses and acts of injustice. Apart from overtly political issues on which the church must take a stand, he hoped the church would learn to deal with the modern world by examining what is valid in the propositions of secularism, atheism, and other intellectual currents—for how could the church meaningfully engage with the world without understanding it?

In articulating these concerns through historical study, Father Schumacher remained an impassioned researcher who was always bound by his sources, not taking liberty with the materials he found through painstaking and meticulous research. He was measured in his interpretations, nationalist in sentiment, and hopeful in outlook. His methodological rigor was matched by his unshakeable faith. As his health faltered and he knew he was in the closing stage of his life, in December 2011 he emailed me to concur, “‘With Jesus the best is yet to come.’ How well with us if we keep that before our eyes.”

**Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.**

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