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History of the Church in the Philippines (1521-1898)

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Book Reviews

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES (1521-1898). By Pablo Fernandez, O.P. Metro Manila, Philippines: National Book Store, 1979. xxi + 447 pages.

This welcome book was written by a Spanish Dominican historian who for years has done research in the documents of Spanish times. It was translated by a Filipino Jesuit historian who was quick to realize its value for all those who read English but not Spanish. It was published by one of the most dynamic Philippine publishing organizations, ever alert for manuscripts useful for many potential readers.

The method followed throughout is a varied mixture of the chronological and the topical; although the history basically flows from beginning to end, it is interspersed with many chapters on specific topics, which gather together in one place the most important information on that one theme. These examples can be typical: The Church and Education, Works of Charity, Faith and Customs, Exemplars of Virtue and Sanctity, The Catholic Church and the Development of Agriculture in the Philippines, The Printing Press, Tagalog and Visayan Philology; and many others.

Although, as the cover states, these pages are "a tribute to the Spanish friars of 1521 to 1898, lovingly written by one of their countrymen," the general tone is not unmitigated praise. In various places the author points out mistakes, deficiencies, failures; in general, however, since objectively the good accomplished through these centuries was more abundant, the history naturally emphasizes the more praiseworthy contributions to the growth of the Philippines in religion principally, and then in other fields.

One value of this work is the documentation. The footnotes refer to sections in volumes and unpublished manuscripts which few researchers today could find for themselves; helped by these citations, however, they can proceed to the sources quoted and be in contact with the contemporary data and interpretations.

Although the title limits the years to 1521-1898, the author does not hesitate to go as far as 1910 when discussing the adjustment after the revolution,

especially the sale of the Friar Lands in the early years of the American regime. All this material is helpful for an integral view of the total problem.

"If you do not know what happened before you were born, you will be like a child all your life." These words, attributed to the Roman Cicero, can be an apt final commentary on this book about Church history in the Philippines. The more information available concerning the years before the present generation came on the scene of life, the more accurate can be its judgments on the past and on the present that flows from that past. Despite its various limitations, which the author himself admits in the preface, this book can be a useful instrument for all those interested in the history of the Philippines.

F. X. Clark, S.J.

JOVITA FUENTES, A LIFETIME OF MUSIC. By Lilia Hernandez Chung.
Manila: The Jovita Fuentes Musicultural Society, 1979. 184 pages.

The reader starts out with the classic image of the prima donna as imperious, determined, self-centered yet self-giving, self-confident yet ever seeking perfection, vastly talented, feared and revered, respected and loved, bigger than life, beyond imagination – and the image remains intact. Drawn with bold clear strokes by niece Lilia Hernandez Chung, this portrait of Jovita Fuentes emerges as a living gift to the new generation of Filipinos for whom Jovita Fuentes would have remained only a mute legend.

Schooled in Spanish and brought up in the strict traditions of upper middle class gentility, Jovita Fuentes belonged to a large prosperous clan that delighted in music, dance and drama. Theirs was a household where even the servant girls sang at their tasks (it was from them that the young Jovita learned *Ay! Kalisud* and *Walang Angay*, Visayan folk songs that she was to make famous) and music surrounded and nurtured the young from infancy. The well-to-do father hired the best music teachers of the town (Capiz, now Roxas City) to hone the Fuentes children's talent. The family wealth allowed the determined Jovita to sail for Manila, and later Europe, in pursuit of greater achievements in her art.

Only a loving relative-biographer could have had access to a full view of the character of Jovita Fuentes. Only she could have softened the strong, almost harsh lines of the singer's portrait as total artist, for whom "*Hermoso seria morir cantando, morir, por el arte.*" After her triumphs in the most respected opera theatres of the world, she came home to teach. She was a formidable, commanding petite figure. "There were screams, furious scolding, tears, but she spoke with firm authority and gave unstintingly of herself." And yet, as a maturing young woman, first in Capiz, and then in Manila, there was an intense and apparently long lasting love affair between her and a brilliant