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E. J. Halsema: Colonial Engineer, by Halsema

Review Author: Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

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To their credit, the above authors have shunned the flagrant racism found throughout Whitehead's work, a prejudice that insults and demeans Filipinos and Japanese alike some forty-five years after hostilities ceased. At one point Whitehead pens, for example, that the "girls in Cuyo were very pretty, of lighter complexion and with finer features" (p. 245), and when Jurado "asked me if I would approve of my sister marrying a Filipino . . . my answer did not improve our relationship" (p. 259). From beginning to end, the Japanese are "Japs" and stereotyped negatively as "slant-eyes" (p. 102) and "sadistic fiends" (p. 173) that "had a somewhat apish walk" (p. 160), an image most recently analyzed in John W. Dower's *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*.

Nevertheless, Whitehead has succeeded in writing an insightful and readable account about his wartime experiences. Both the general reader and specialist, once alerted to the author's prejudice, should benefit from reading his study while this reviewer recommends *Odyssey of a Philippine Scout*, ironically, for its cross-cultural perspective.

Rodney J. Ross
Social Science, Public Service
and Basic Education Division
Harrisburg Area Community College
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

E.J. Halsema: Colonial Engineer. A Biography. By James J. Halsema. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1991. xiii, 413 pages, pictures.

We seldom imagine how life would be if we did not have houses complete with furniture and facilities like running water and electricity. True of individuals, this is also true of institutions and political entities, like the Philippines. And yet hardly any attention has been given to this element of our national life. Philippine historians spend hours studying various aspects of our past, but research into infrastructure has not been a priority.

This is the merit of this brief biography, a son's work of love, that seeks to fathom the man his father was. It is the story of one of the first successful American engineers who cast their lot with the new American colony in the Far East and helped improve the physical conditions that were an integral element in the growth of the Philippine nation. Fortunately, the story did not degenerate into an emotional caricature, but is a dignified, respectful, and sober picture of a man Filipinos would do well to know.

Three things impress the reader of this book: Eusebius J. Halsema himself, his career in prewar Philippines, and his significance in the total context of Philippine history. Born in 1882 in Ohio, of Danish ancestors who had migrated to the United States, Halsema came to the Philippines as a

young engineering graduate in need of work. He had answered an advertisement for an examination for possible civil engineers needed in the new American colony, passed it, was mustered into the U.S. Civil Service, and arrived in Manila in 1908.

He was immediately assigned to Cebu. There he made his mark as the engineer behind the first water reservoir above the city, providing it with its first modern water system, and promoting basic sanitation and health services for the people. At that time, engineering and other public construction projects depended to a large extent on one's ingenuity and resourcefulness. Spare parts for broken machinery were obtainable only in the United States some 10,000 kilometers away, and after a wait of more or less six months. Budgetary constraints had to be considered, too. And, more importantly, ability to work with Filipinos was a not unimportant factor which could either help or delay the work.

In all this, Halsema proved his mettle. Proof is his successful subsequent career. Unlike some of his peers who returned to the United States, he decided to remain in the Philippines. After his work in Cebu, he became provincial engineer for Pampanga, then for Baguio, where for years he was concurrently its beloved mayor. Baguio City is as it looks today because of him. He died in Baguio City in 1943, a victim of the bombing raids by the American liberation forces.

Halsema came to the Philippines when men of his training and talent were needed. Governor Forbes correctly saw that basic infrastructure—roads, bridges, a modern water system, buildings, etc.—was indispensable if the country was to move ahead. Luckily, the governor had official support in Washington, D.C., palpable at least in decent salaries and other incentives he procured from budget-conscious officials to induce career men to come to the Philippines. Filipino engineers and other professionals were still unavailable, and Americans were needed to fill the vacuum. The Filipinization later introduced by the Harrison government naturally discouraged and even demoralized many Americans in the Philippines who quit the service, making more acute the need for trained technicians. (In time, of course, the *pensionados* returned home, and they gradually replaced the pioneers who had either left the country or died.) Halsema again stands out because, putting it colloquially, he "stuck it out."

Although a civil service employee, Halsema seems to have avoided—abhorred?—unnecessary political connections to promote his career. He seemed blessed with uncanny insight into the apolitical nature of his work, which was highly technical, and he dedicated himself to carrying out his role. Reserved and not given to idle talk, much less to socializing, as his son writes in this biography, his work brought him a keen sense of fulfillment; it was his recreation.

Originally serialized in the quarterly *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* (Manila), the present version reads easily. Information is duly docu-

mented, alongside personal interviews and memoirs. Significantly, personal letters are not an abundant source, but their lack is supplied by several official reports, and the story moves ahead. Possibly, a minor drawback is the narrow perspective, perhaps unavoidable in a biography.

A wider perspective could have explicated Halsema's place in Philippine history. We seldom advert to it, but policies for the new colony succeeded precisely because of people like him. Men who did what they did we seldom consider, for example Conant, the man responsible for introducing the new Philippine currency (\$1=P0.50); Ferguson, the executive secretary who made things move in the Governor's office; the chief of police, who made sure law and order prevailed in the country; the unnamed secretaries who drafted the laws for the fledgling National Assembly, whose members, steeped in the Spanish legal system, were still unfamiliar with the American lawmaking processes, etc.

Critics of the Philippine colonial past could perhaps think twice before mouthing inane generalizations. Colonization is never an unmixed evil, for even with the most heartless exploitation, the colony profits and develops in the end. This is best seen in Rizal and his peers, men who were the inevitable result of Spanish rule. But, we must not forget, colonial policies depend on the unsung government officials who implement them from day to day, the ears and the eyes, the hands and the feet that translated theory into reality. E.J. Halsema was one of these. This is the message of the biography written by his son.

*Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.
Department of History
Ateneo de Manila University*

Responses to the Signs of the Times. Selected Documents: Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines. By Abdon Ma. C. Josol, CSsR. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1991. xiii, 380 pages.

The injunction of the Roman Catholic Church to read the "signs of the times" and work for social justice in the modern world, emphasized in the work of Vatican II and subsequent papal encyclicals, is clearly reflected in the pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) since the late 1960s. The bishops' positions on social issues from 1967 to 1991 dominate the contents of the thirty-five pastoral letters selected by Josol. Issues of justice, poverty, violence, and human rights in Philippine society are discussed in twenty-two of the pastoral letters, while other concerns such as the eradication of graft and corruption, treatment of minorities, the exploitation of women, the degradation of the environment, and the Philippine international debt are examined in ten pastoral letters. In addi-