Religious Aspects of the Revolution in Bikol

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Among the many aspects of Philippine history which need research on the regional and local level, the history of the Revolution is notable. Since the Revolution had its start in the Tagalog provinces, and since the government of the Republic was to be found there, it was perhaps inevitable that such earlier histories of the Revolution as Kalaw's and Agoncillo's should center their attention there. What is more, however, the tendency has been also to assume that in other regions the causes of the Revolution and the attitudes of people toward nationalism, toward the friars, etc. were substantially identical with those of the Tagalog region. In the course of the research for my book, The Revolutionary Clergy, it became clear to me that not only the course of events, but such things as the involvement of the Filipino clergy, the religious interpretation(s) of the war, and attitudes toward the Spanish friars, varied considerably from one region to another. Hence, in this note, without repeating all that I have said in my book on the prominent role of the Bikolano clergy in supporting the Revolution, I should like to discuss certain religious aspects of the Revolution in the Bikol provinces that manifest a situation different from the generalizations usually made about the Revolution.

THE BIKOL ECCLESIASTICAL SITUATION IN 1898

As is commonly known, one of the earliest factors in the rise of nationalism was the policy of the Spanish government in the nineteenth century to eliminate the influence of the Filipino secular clergy by systematically putting Spanish friars at the head of an increasing number of parishes, as a matter of national security. It was due to the protests, first of Fr. Pedro Pelaez and Fr. Mariano Gomez, and later of Fr. Jose Burgos, that the beginnings of nationalism were aroused in the second half of the nineteenth century. The government did its
best to crush those beginnings by the executions and exiles of 1872. It is in these events that one finds the origins, though not the only causes, of the antifriar attitudes which were to characterize the nationalist movement, and make the expulsion of the friars a goal of the more radical revolutionaries.

In 1898 only 158 at most (16 percent or less) of the 967 parishes and missions in the Philippines were headed by a Filipino priest. The situation in the diocese of Caceres, however, was considerably different. The only Spanish friars in the parishes were the Franciscans. Of the 124 parishes in the diocese, 65 were under the care of the Franciscans, while 58 of them, or 47 percent, were under the Filipino secular clergy. If one speaks specifically of the Bikol provinces, however, the percentage of Filipino-administered parishes is even higher, certainly over 50 percent. For, included at that time in the diocese of Caceres, though not part of the Bikol region, were a number of towns in Tayabas, all of which seem to have been under the Franciscans. Hence, though exact figures cannot be compiled in the present state of the evidence, the percentage of Bikol parishes in the hands of the secular clergy was well over 50 percent. This was in vivid contrast with the proportions

1. Percentages compiled from the statistics reproduced in John N. Schumacher, S.J., *Readings in Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 1979), pp. 309–10. These statistics, furnished by the secretary of the Archbishop of Manila, appeared in *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart* (New York, September 1900), p. 822. The actual percentage was somewhat less, since the statistics are for secular priests rather than for Filipino priests, and there were at least a few Spaniards among the secular clergy (at least one in Caceres, as may be seen from n. 2 below). But their total number was very small, and for practical purposes the friars were Spaniards and the secular clergy were Filipinos.

2. There was one secular priest in the cathedral who was a Spaniard. See Apolinario Pastrana Riol, O.F.M., ed., *A Friar's Account of the Philippine Revolution in Bicol. An Unpublished Manuscript of Fr. Marcos Gómez, O.F.M., about the Philippine Revolution of 1898 in Ambos Camarines* (Quezon City: Franciscan Friary of St. Gregory the Great, 1980), pp. 198, 270, n. 112. This account, by one of the friars who suffered imprisonment by the revolutionaries, provides much information on certain aspects of the Revolution in Camarines Norte and in Naga. The author is harsh in his judgments, of Spaniards as well as of Filipinos, having written in the aftermath of his own sufferings as a prisoner, and the account must be used with discrimination. It is, nonetheless, valuable for many events, since it was an eyewitness account, and was not available at the time Elias Ataviado wrote his account of the Revolution in the Bicol provinces.

3. According to the figures given in Apolinario Pastrana Riol, O.F.M., “Franciscanos Españoles repatriados con motivo de la Revolución Filipina de 1898,” *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 35 (1975): 8, there were 67 Franciscans in the diocese of Caceres in 1898, of whom 14 were in Tayabas, the others in Ambos Camarines and Albay. However, these numbers are not for parish priests alone, but for the total number of Franciscan friars, whether parish priests or coadjutors. Moreover, they include nine friars who were not in parishes at all, but in the Colegio of Guinobatan. Though the various sets of figures
of parishes held by the Filipino clergy in other dioceses—10 percent in Manila, 19 percent in Cebu, 13 percent in Jaro, and 4 percent in Nueva Segovia.4

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FRIARS

It is not totally surprising then to find that the strong antagonism between Filipino clergy and Spanish friars, which was characteristic of the dioceses of Manila and Nueva Segovia in particular, does not seem to have manifested itself to any significant extent in the Bikol provinces.5 Though it is true that some of the Bikolano clergy tried to obtain the appointment of a Filipino ecclesiastical governor for the diocese, from both Fr. Román González, O.S.A., the actual ecclesiastical governor, and from Archbishop Nozaleda of Manila, this was not in itself an antifriar act, nor a schismatic one. In fact, the bishops of Cebu and Jaro had both appointed Filipino priests to govern in their absence, and, even though by deception, as would later appear, Bishop Hevia of Nueva Segovia had appointed Aglipay ecclesiastical governor while he was a prisoner in his own diocese.6

The Revolution itself in the Bikol provinces, whatever may have been the case elsewhere, was not at all antifriar. When revolt broke out in Daet in April 1898, though some of the friars took refuge with the other Spaniards, several others in Camarines Norte remained in

cannot be totally reconciled so as to determine the exact percentages, the possible approximations make clear that over 50 percent of the Bikol parishes were under Filipino priests.

4. All these percentages are slightly high, due to their being for secular clergy rather than for Filipino clergy, as explained in n. 1 above.

5. The account of Fr. Marcos Gómez is critical of certain Filipino priests who tried to persuade the Augustinian provisor, or ecclesiastical governor, of the diocese, Fr. Román González, to turn over his authority to a Filipino priest. Nonetheless in only two cases does he speak of any manifestation of hostility or coldness on the part of any of the Filipino clergy toward the friars, though he is harshly critical of them on other points, as well as bitterly condemning the attitude of the Vincentians and even of the Provvisor. The general attitude of the Filipino clergy was quite different in Nueva Segovia, and to some extent in Manila. See John N. Schumacher, S.J., The Revolutionary Clergy: The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement, 1850–1903 (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1981), pp. 103–5, 201–2.

6. Schumacher, Revolutionary Clergy, pp. 139, 181, 94–96. There was, however, a somewhat different situation in Caceres, inasmuch as Bishop Arsenio Campo, O.S.A., had left the country for Spain in June 1898, and had appointed Fr. Román González in his place. Having only delegated authority, Román apparently did not have the canonical power to subdelegate his authority to another. See Pastrana, Friar's Account, p. 208.
their parishes. Even those who had taken refuge in Daet returned to their parishes afterwards and all remained undisturbed until they felt threatened by Lukban’s Tagalog forces coming from Tayabas. Though some then left for Naga on the urging of the Spanish officials, others still remained behind. When the Spaniards finally decided to abandon Daet, after brutally killing Filipino prisoners, they left these friars behind, evidently hoping that the other Filipinos would revenge themselves on the helpless friars for these Spanish atrocities. As a matter of fact, the Filipinos recognized the difference between the friars and the other Spaniards, and escorted the friars peacefully to Naga when they thought it best for them to go.

When revolution finally broke out in Naga itself, with bloody consequences, no action was taken against any of the Spanish clergy. The Vincentians remained in the seminary, and continued to teach for some months. Only when the armed Spanish officials took refuge in their convent of San Francisco were the Franciscans placed in danger,

7. Elias M. Ataviado, *The Philippine Revolution in the Bicol Region*, tr. Juan T. Ataviado (Manila: Encal Press, 1953), pp. 112-13, tells of the committee (tribunal de cuchillo) set up by the Spanish governor after the uprising had been put down in Daet, to determine who had been involved in the uprising. As a result of the committee’s activity large numbers of Filipinos, including many officials of the town and its vicinity, were executed. Ataviado names Fray A- M — as one of the committee together with the military officers. This friar would have to be Fr. Antonino Mariblanca, if Ataviado is correct. However, Father Gómez makes no mention of any friar taking part, and indeed expresses his own, and their, criticism of the way people were executed. It does not seem likely that he would say nothing of such a grave violation of his priestly character by Father Mariblanca. Moreover, given the hostile relationship between the Spanish officers and the friars, recorded by Gómez, it seems highly unlikely that they would have even allowed a friar to join their tribunal. It is possible that Ataviado’s informant confused Father Antonino Mariblanca with his brother, Siro Mariblanca, a layman, who was among the Spaniards there, and who was in fact connected in some way with the executions. However, it also seems worth noting that Fr. Antonino Mariblanca left the Franciscan order almost immediately after he got back to Spain on being released from imprisonment. See Pastrana, *Friar’s Account*, pp. 166-68.


9. Pastrana, *Friar’s Account*, pp. 180-86. Ataviado, *Philippine Revolution*, p. 127, says that all the friars of Camarines Norte left with the first ship for Hong Kong. Given the fact that Fr. Marcos Gómez was one of the friars in question from Camarines Norte, this information, which came to Ataviado only at second hand, is certainly incorrect.

since the revolutionaries threatened to burn the church in order to get the Spaniards out. At this point the revolutionaries turned to Fr. Román González who advised them against further bloodshed, and eventually arranged for the surrender of the Spaniards.\(^{11}\)

Those friars who were still in parishes in the province of Camarines Sur, were brought to Naga with great courtesy, and, at the decision of the Provisor, all of the clergy lived together in the seminary, where he himself stayed.\(^{12}\) Not only was the ecclesiastical authority of the Augustinian provisor given full respect by the Filipino troops, but the revolutionaries themselves turned to him to select who among them should be the Filipino governor to succeed the Spaniards. Fr. González’s choice of the Civil Guard corporal, Elias Angeles, one of the two leaders of the revolt, was welcomed with respect, and González’s advice continued to be sought by the revolutionaries.\(^{13}\) It is clear that in Camarines, not only did antifriar feeling have no part in the origins of the Revolution, but that it was respect for the friars which at times protected the other Spaniards from ill-treatment.

The news of the bloodshed in Naga and the knowledge of the fall of Manila led the Spaniards in the other Bikol provinces to peacefully turn over authority to Filipinos and to embark for Manila very shortly afterward. Thus all the Franciscan friars in Albay freely departed with the rest of the Spaniards there.\(^{14}\)

It is of interest for the understanding of the position occupied by the Filipino clergy in these early days of the Revolution to see that in Sorsogon, the Spanish governor turned over his authority to Fr. Jorge Barlin, the future first Filipino bishop, at that time parish priest of the town of Sorsogon and vicar-forane of the province. Apparently Barlin held that authority until the arrival of Gen. Ananias Diokno shortly after. In Albay, on the other hand, the Spanish governor turned over authority to a committee of Filipinos, headed by Anacleto Solano. When the committee held elections for governor after the departure of the Spaniards, Fr. Victorino Peña, parish priest of Albay, was first elected, but declined in favor of Solano, considering that the post was incompatible with his priestly duties.\(^{15}\) Clearly, in the mind of the Bikolanos the Filipino priests had succeeded to the civic role, as well as to the parishes, of the friars.

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14. Ataviado, *Philippine Revolution*, pp. 110-11. There were no Franciscans in the parishes of the other Bikol provinces, which were all under the Filipino secular clergy.
Likewise in Albay, all was accomplished without any signs of hostility toward the friars, as certain incidents illustrate. In Guinobatan, it was Simeon Ola, later to become so well-known as a guerrilla commander, who accompanied the Franciscan, Fr. Carlos Cavido (Cabido) to the town of Camalig, together with Fr. Jose Natera, Cabido’s Filipino coadjutor, who would himself become a leading commander, second only to Colonel Ramon F. Santos and Gen. Vito Belarmino in the Filipino struggle against the Americans in Albay. Moreover, the friar parish priests were allowed to bring the parish funds with them. Indeed, in the case of the friars of Daraga who in their haste to get to Legaspi to embark left their funds behind, other Albayanos went to fetch them and restore them to the Franciscans before they sailed. This was in stark contrast to the forcible appropriation of all friar funds by revolutionaries in other parts of Luzon, whether for the government or for their own private gain. Indeed in some cases elsewhere friars were even tortured by unscrupulous men to find out where more alleged funds were hidden.

In Naga, too, the twenty-two Franciscans, as well as the other Spaniards, could have left peacefully and avoided being imprisoned if the decision had depended on the Naga revolutionary leaders. Though resolved to leave for Manila by ship, and having received the acquiescence of the acting Filipino governor, Elias Angeles, they delayed because of their uncertainty as to what had happened in Albay, and whether they could safely proceed through the latter province to get a ship in Legaspi. Upon receiving a favorable reply from Albay, the Provisor went to the governor to obtain the promised passes, only to encounter there the emissary whom Gen. Vicente Lukban had sent ahead to prepare for his arrival, a Captain Herrera. Not only did the latter see to it, on the authority of Lukban, that the passes were denied, he left orders which soon made the lot of the Spaniards in general and the friars in particular more difficult. No longer might the friars go to the cathedral or elsewhere to say Mass, and all but a tiny portion of their funds and those of the seminary were confiscated.

With the arrival of Lukban himself all the friars were imprisoned in the seminary,

16. “Relato del Sr. Simeon Ola, Ex-comandante del Ejército Revolucionario de Albay, dado a mi el 10 de Diciembre de 1938 . . .,” in Elias Ataviado Collection, “Materiales para los tomos II y III de Lucha y Libertad,” MS, vol. 6, p. 10; microfilm copy in Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University. In Camalig were gathered other Spaniards who were to be conducted to Legaspi to take ship (Ataviado, Philippine Revolution, pp. 123–25).
and were subject to various harassments. A short while later they were moved to the Casa Gobierno, where they were held incommunicado. Lukban also attempted unsuccessfuuly to force the Provisor to appoint a Filipino priest to his position.20

The good or poor treatment of the friars in the succeeding months was to vary according to the civil and military authorities who were in power. They would be imprisoned in the public jail at two different periods. Under a more favorable military or civilian leader they were at different times allowed to live in part of the old Franciscan infirmary. At certain periods they were allowed to go freely around the city. At others they were harshly imprisoned again.21 Without enumerating in detail all the vicissitudes which befell them, the sad period may be summed up as a continual effort on the part of the Bikolanos to obtain the liberty, or at least the good treatment, of the friars, against the greater or less antagonism held by most of the authorities sent from Malolos. Some, like Vicente Lukban and Wenceslao Viniegra openly persecuted the friars; others, like Estanislao Legaspi and especially Antonio Guevara, were willing to make their lot easier, but often had to yield to other powers in the government, whether in Naga or Malolos.22

Most Bikolano officials did their best to intervene on behalf of the friars, and prominent women in the city saw to it that they were properly fed. When they were transferred from the seminary to the Casa Gobierno and kept incommunicado on the orders of Vicente Lukban, the Provisor requested of Lukban that at least they be allowed to have a portable altar and the necessary means for Mass. The request was ignored by Lukban. When the Provisor complained to the Bikolano, Comandante Guisala, that at least they could be given that consolation in their imprisonment, the response was indicative of the situation:

This commander excused himself, saying that Lukban had not wanted it, but that he himself would send an altar and vestments as soon as Lukban marched off, which would probably be on the following day. When Lukban

22. See, e.g., the efforts of Guevara on behalf of the friars, ibid., pp. 244-46. Though he was governor at the time, several of his orders were indirectly countermanded by Colonel Peña, a fierce enemy of friars. Guevara was afraid or unable to prevail, in spite of his good sentiments. Fr. Gómez blames him for being timid, but it is likely that the answer lay in the vicissitudes of political power in Malolos. Gómez condemns Legaspi for not doing more to aid the friars, and attributes this to pecuniary motives, which may or may not be correct. Certainly the case is not as clear as he claims (ibid., pp. 232-34).
marched off to the province of Albay, they sent us everything necessary for the celebration of Mass.23

Vicente Lukban was born in Labo, Camarines Norte, and was thus a Bikolano, though from a predominantly Tagalog-speaking town. He had been educated and spent most of his life in Manila. There he had become a Mason, had been imprisoned in 1896, and had been with Aguinaldo in Biak-na-bato, as well as in exile in Hong Kong.24 He was then of the anticlerical group of the Malolos government, and not of the mind of most Bikolanos. Indeed when Lukban was later in Samar, almost all the Filipino priests would leave in protest against their harassment by Lukban.25

A contrast may be seen in his brother, Justo, who came to Naga as representative of the Malolos government, to collect funds. At various times he went to visit the friars, offered his services to attend to their needs, and according to one of the Franciscan prisoners,

told us that he did not look favorably on the way that they were treating us; that, although it was true that we still exercised influence and that with a harangue we could destroy the edifice of the Revolution, nonetheless he thought the way of proceeding of his countrymen was very unjust and incorrect. . . . The conversation of this distinguished Filipino makes manifest that the country was not opposed to having the friars continue in their respective charges, and that the much-bruited-about hatred for the friar was more nominal than real.26

Though perhaps the view expressed in the last sentence is an overly self-serving judgment of Father Gómez, the attitude of Justo Lukban makes it clear that antifriar measures which took place in Naga were the fruit of Malolos policy and of some Tagalog commanders, not the attitudes of the Bikolanos in general.

On the other hand, there is little or no indication in the account of Fr. Gómez that the Bikolanos who sympathized with and did their best to aid the friars, were hostile to the Revolution as such, or that they accepted the authority of the Malolos government only by force. Given the bitter emotional condemnations of Filipino revolutionaries so often expressed in Gómez’s account, it seems unlikely that he would have left such disaffection with the Revolution unmentioned, if he were aware of any. The point has its importance in showing the

23. Ibid., p. 214.
25. Schumacher, Revolutionary Clergy, p. 141.
inadequacy of a simplistic historiography which tries to identify antifriar sentiments with nationalism. To reduce the Revolution to an antifriar manifestation, besides falsifying the variety of attitudes which existed at the time toward the friars in general and toward particular friars, would be to devalue the significance of the Revolution for Filipino nationalism.

BIKOLANO NATIONALIST VISION

If antifriar sentiments played little or no part in bringing about the Revolution in the Bikol provinces, one must still ask to what extent the Bikolanos shared in the nationalist ideas which had spread so widely in the Tagalog provinces and brought about the Revolution there. Since the writings of the Propaganda Movement were in Spanish, spoken only by some five percent of Filipinos, the most effective means of spreading these ideas beyond the educated had been the Katipunan and the Tagalog writings it produced. In the Bikol provinces the only known effort to organize the Katipunan was that of Ildefonso Moreno in Daet, under instructions from Vicente Lukban. But this unit of the Katipunan, which only began to be organized in late 1897, was totally destroyed in April 1898, as seen above. Hence whatever little influence in creating revolutionary thinking it may have achieved went no further.

Nonetheless, once the Revolution had broken out in the Bikol provinces in 1898, it was precisely the ideas of the Propaganda Movement, and of Rizal in particular, which became the basis for arousing support for the war. Ataviado has described how in 1899 the bolo-armed sandatahanes would come together on Sundays for training and construction of defenses against the Americans. After a field Mass at which all assisted, the revolutionary leaders tried to further inflame their patriotism. Ataviado's summary of their speeches, though too long to reproduce, deserves to be quoted at least in part to illustrate the ideas proposed.

They explained that these fertile islands called the Philippines were the land God had given to our ancestors: to those brave Malays who challenged the perils of unknown seas to make these lands their Fatherland and to establish in them their home, so that their posterity, without outside intervention, could work out for themselves their own happiness, as free beings, worthy to be called children of God.

They explained that when the Spanish navigators had arrived in these shores four centuries ago, they entered into alliance with the rulers then reigning in the country for purposes of cooperation and mutual help here
in the Far East, and that it was for this reason that the Spaniards were permitted to establish themselves in these islands; that that alliance was not one of a master and lord on the one side and of a slave and subject on the other, but of two contracting parties equal in position, as is attested by the blood, Spanish and Filipino, which the ruler of Manila and the Spanish Adelantado Miguel López de Legazpi, in the name of the King of Spain, drank with each other. . . .

The passage goes on to tell how the Spaniards, having violated that mutual pact, had lost their rights, so that the Tagalogs had revolted, "and with the blood of Rizal and other martyrs and the leadership of General Don Emilio Aguinaldo, it has pleased Providence that the Filipinos recover their liberty and the absolute ownership of their native land. . . ." Much less did the Americans have any right to this land, the exhortation continued, as it called on all who were worthy compatriots of Rizal and the other national heroes to resist their yoke.

Two points are especially worthy of notice. One is the appeal to Rizal's vision of Philippine history as found in his edition of Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* and other writings, and particularly of the *pacto de sangre* as an agreement between two free peoples, now abrogated because of Spain's tyranny. These themes unite the Bikolano revolution with the mainstream vision stemming from Rizal, as well as making an appeal to his ideas and example.

The other point deserving of attention is particularly Bikolano: the emphasis on this land being God's gift, and on God's calling the Filipinos to be His children. The ideas are surely not totally alien to Rizal, but are not so explicit in his writings, and even less in Bonifacio, where the latter recast Rizal's thought.

For this religious context of Bikolano nationalist thought coming from Rizal, at least one major source of contact with, and perhaps interpretation of, Rizal's thought, was the Bikolano clergy. On 30 December 1898 the province of Albay celebrated the memory of Rizal with a solemn Requiem Mass, with "a life-sized portrait of the National Hero . . . placed over the catafalque raised up in the middle of the...

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., pp. 8–10.
church." The celebration, Ataviado notes, was "exclusively religious". But at the same time he comments:

It was not until then that the people of Albay were able to see the likeness of the Great Martyr. At the same time they began to learn of his life, his struggles and his martyrdom, as also of his pre-eminence in the history of the country. . . . 31

A year later there was a second celebration of Rizal's death anniversary.

. . . The new parish priest of the town, Rev. Fr. Juan Calleja, after the Mass gave a conference in the church, in which he explained to the congregation the life, the studies, the struggles, the ideals, and the death of our National Hero. It was the first time that the Albayanos heard a conference, as polished as it was brilliant, on the life of Dr. Jose Rizal.32

It may be noted that Father Calleja was one of the delegation of priests who went to Malolos to pledge the allegiance of the Bikol clergy to the Republic after the arrival of Lukban in the region.33 He would later be a chaplain, with the rank of captain, for the guerrillas in the mountains of Albay.34

CONCLUSION

There is much else that could be said about the religious aspects of the Revolution in the Bikol region—the importance of the religious motive for strengthening resistance to the Americans among ordinary people, who saw them as the Protestant nation which aimed at destroying Filipino Catholicism. The key role was played by the Filipino priests, perhaps more here than in any other region, as military leaders in a few cases, as chaplains in many more, and as those whose presence determined whether people stayed in the mountains or came down to the towns after the American occupation. These aspects I have treated at length in my Revolutionary Clergy.35

32. Ataviado, Lucha y libertad, 2: 30.
33. Letter of Vicente Lukban to Emilio Aguinaldo, 31 October 1898, Philippine Revolutionary Records, P-3, Letters Received 1898-1899, encl. 79, no. 4.
34. Ataviado, "Lucha y libertad," MS, Ataviado Collection, 3: 68.
35. Schumacher, Revolutionary Clergy, pp. 157-75.
The aspects dealt with in this note demonstrate at least two further points. One is that it was possible to have strong support for the Revolution without any significant antifriar sentiment existing among the people, or even among their leaders. A second conclusion is that though the Revolution began among the Tagalogs, the Bikolanos came to share the same positive nationalism which motivated the Revolution against Spain as well as the resistance to the Americans.

Finally, though the point has not yet been sufficiently investigated, it seems likely from the examples narrated here that the Bikolano clergy, who shared the Spanish language with both the clergy and the ilustrados of other regions, would have been one of the major channels, probably the most important one, by which the nationalist ideas of Rizal were propagated to the people as a whole. Both this fact and the well-attested piety of the Bikolanos ensured that their nationalism, while stemming from the same source as that of other Filipinos, would be strongly colored by its religious context and its religious motivation.