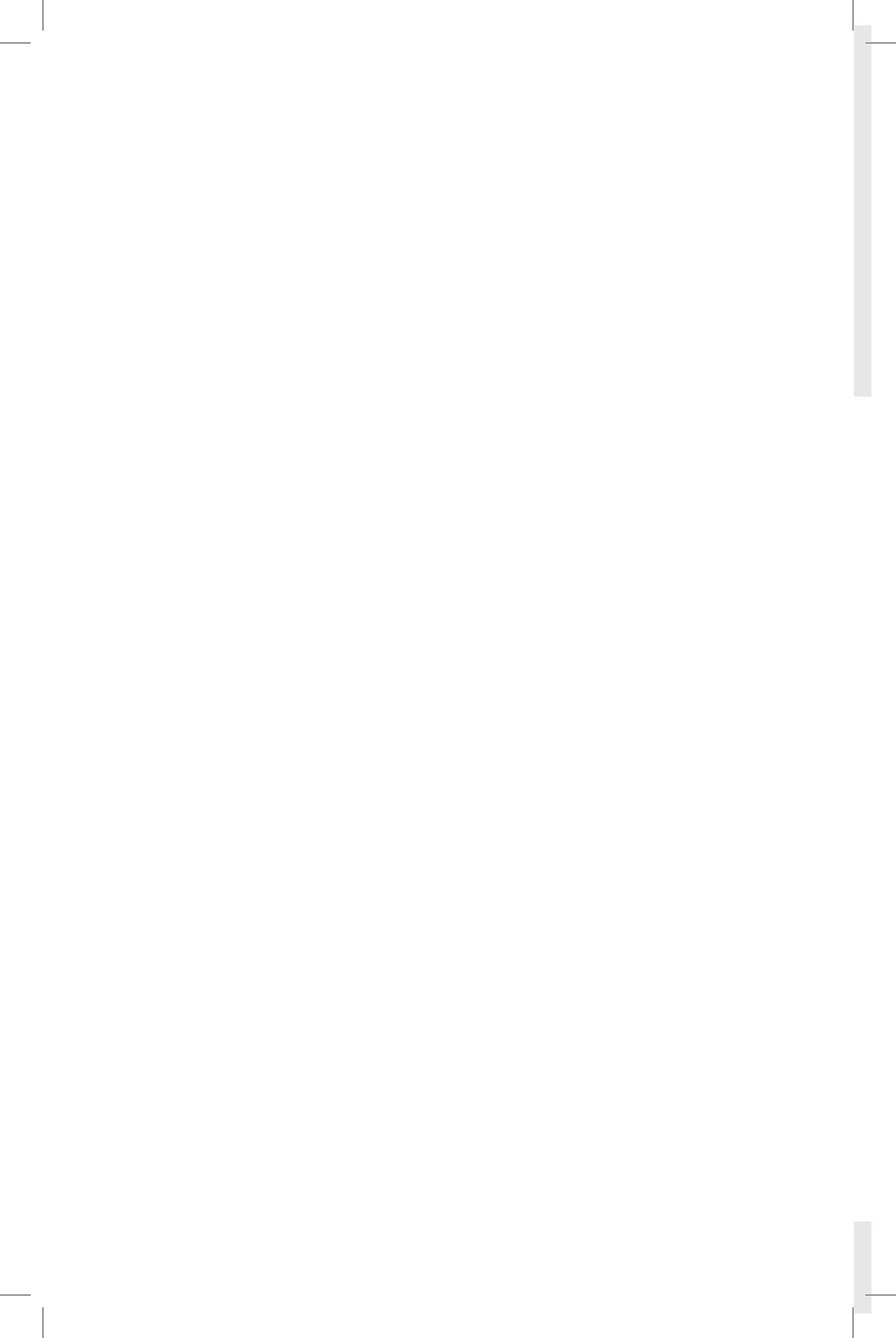




# 500 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

LORENZO CARRARO



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# THE GOSPEL IN THE PHILIPPINES: FAITH AND CULTURE

I am still under the pleasant surprise at the overwhelming performance of the Filipino Catholics during the recent *Simbang Gabi 2021*: after the lockdown of Christmas 2020 because of the pandemic, the crowds that now filled the churches to overflow either very early in the morning or late in the evening are the most beautiful sign of the vitality of Christianity in this country during the 500 years anniversary celebration of its arrival.

I am a foreign missionary who served in Africa, Uganda, before being assigned here more than twenty years ago. There, I was lucky enough to be present at the celebration of the 100 years since the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in 1879: also in Uganda Christianity is thriving and the centenary celebrations brought a huge crowd of more than a million to the shrine of the Uganda Martyrs in Namugongo, near the capital Kampala. In that very year the bloody dictator, Idi Amin Dada, was ousted and people attributed this to the prayers of the Catholic population as a gift from God for their centenary.

The idea of this little book was to gather together the most common traits of the history of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines together with the widely recognized popular features of the Filipino culture inspired by the Christian faith. It is a description of the way the manifestations of the Christian faith have become part and parcel of the Filipino way of celebrating life.

The work of evangelization is a complex task and with different results, with ups and down, with advances and retreats, with joys and anguish. We cannot help admiring the missionary work of the Spanish friars who gathered the people around the beautiful churches that still remain a cultural treasure for the Philippines. Everywhere, the friars were responsible for the starting of schools, the importation of new technologies and new plants and vegetables.

Their acceptance among the people, although they were often demanding and severe disciplinarians, is manifested by the fact that we have no record of violence against Church personnel in history, even considering that they usually were living alone among the indigenous people.

The violent rebellion that broke out around the figure of Hermano Pule (Apolinario de la Cruz) in November 1841 and the controversy of the three secular clergy, Fr. Gomez, Fr. Burgos and Fr. Zamora, in 1872 were motivated by a strong legitimate demand of equal treatment and not by insubordination. The savage reaction of the Spanish authorities created martyrs and prepared the way for independence.

The fact that Christianity arrived and developed together with the colonial domination of the Spaniards has constituted a problem for the identity of the Filipino people. Not everybody is able to make the distinction between the two. And yet the assimilation of Christianity, in the form of Catholicism, is so evident in the life and culture of the Filipino people that it is wisdom to accept the historical circumstances and the pervasive Catholic culture.

This is the legacy of the most famous sons of the Philippines: the national hero, Jose Rizal, and a contemporary outstanding writer and poet, Nick Joaquin, have embodied this wisdom.

The ten million Filipinos abroad carry around their Catholic faith and their beloved way of praying and celebrating wherever they are. In this way, the communities of Filipinos abroad are reviving the Catholic local churches where they worship. Point of departure to prove their spontaneous, non-official mission to the world is the large number of Filipinos in Rome.

For the 2019 *Simbang Gabi*, they even managed to recruit Pope Francis to preside the Mass of the first day of the Novena... What is happening in Rome is true everywhere they are.... To honor their devotion to the Christian faith they received, this little book is dedicated.

- Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, MCCJ

# The Fascination of the “Little Boy”

*On March 16, 1521, Magellan and his Spanish fleet arrived in the Philippines. The first Mass was celebrated at Limasawa. The newly-baptized Queen Juana received the statue of the Santo Niño, like the seed of faith. It was the birth of Christianity in this country.*

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**F**ive hundred years ago, on March 16, 1521, an unusual happening marked the beginning of a new era for the large archipelago in the China Sea that constitutes the Philippines: a small Spanish fleet headed by Ferdinand Magellan docked on Cebu island.

The first Mass was celebrated on Easter Day, March 31, 1521, according to Magellan’s journal writer, Antonio Pigafetta. The celebrant was the expedition chaplain, Fr. Pedro Valderama and it happened in a place identified by Pigafetta as Mazaua, which is recognized as the present-day Limasawa.

The approach with the local population was friendly. We have news of the mass baptism of Rajah Humabon, the chief of the place, and 800 of his subjects. Rajah Humabon took the name of Carlos, like the king of Spain, and his wife was baptized Juana, like the queen.

As a baptismal gift, Juana was presented with the image of the Infant Jesus which she chose over the images of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The mass baptism in Cebu can be considered as the birth of Christianity in the Philippines.

## **VIOLENT RESISTANCE**

But not everybody was welcoming. The first defeat inflicted by Filipinos on Western invaders took place on April 27, 1521, at Mactan island, when followers of a local chief, Datu Lapu Lapu, repulsed a force of 49 Spaniards with some native warriors, led by Ferdinand Magellan.

According to Pigafetta’s account, it was Magellan who sent a message to Lapu Lapu in these terms: “Obey the King of Spain, recognizing him as your sovereign, and pay us your tribute. If you refuse, you



will see how our lances wound.” Lapu Lapu proudly replied, saying that they too had “lances of bamboo and stakes hardened by fire.”

In the battle that ensued, Spanish swords and guns were pitted against iron-tipped spears, arrows, and even stones. With their numerical advantage, Lapu Lapu’s men overcame the invading force, killing four Spaniards including Magellan.

### **THE COST OF A CONQUEST**

After the battle, Juan Sebastián del Cano succeeded Magellan as head of the expedition, and ordered the immediate departure of his fleet, returning to Spain in September 1522, and completing the first circumnavigation of the world.

Magellan’s convoy had left Spain on August 10, 1519, with five ships and 286 men on board. Those who came back under the command of del Cano were 18 men in one single ship, three years later. Magellan and his team had paid the supreme sacrifice for their daringness.

Only thirty years had passed since the discovery of the new world by Christopher Columbus. Whole continents were now opened to the courage and endurance of the Iberian people—the Spaniards and the Portuguese. The Filipinos may have intuited all this unconsciously as they fell under the spell of the Santo Niño.

### **THE HOLY LITTLE BOY**

Over time, the image of Santo Niño was lost, until the arrival of another Spanish conquistador, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi in Cebu, whose crew found a Santo Niño statue amid some ruins.

*Antonio Pigafetta,  
Italian chronicler  
of the Spanish  
expedition to  
the Philippines,  
presenting the  
Sto. Niño statue to  
Hara Humamay.*



The new Spanish arrival took the discovery of the holy image as a sign that God approved the conquest and the Christianization of what would become the Spanish Philippines. A church was later built in the area where the relic was found, which became the present-day Basilica Menor del Santo Niño de Cebu.

Cebu City prides itself as the cradle of Christianity in the Philippines. It has a memorial of Magellan's Cross, and the Basilica of the Santo Niño houses two of the three oldest Christian relics in the country: the image of the "Ecce Homo" that the Queen of Cebu declined as a baptismal present from Magellan, and the Santo Niño that she accepted and doted on.

The image of the Santo Niño, the Little Boy Jesus, in elaborate dress tacked in a revered corner of most Filipino homes, comes with 500 years of history that we are celebrating.

This comes with the Spanish conquest. But the country's history must be remembered as it unfolded, both the good and the bad. From the Spanish-sowed Christian faith, sprung the revolutionaries who fought for the freedom of the Filipino people.

From a symbol of conquest, the Santo Niño has evolved into a symbol of every Filipino - dressed as a chef, a jeepney driver, pilot, judge - a familiar icon guarding and blessing homes and offices.

"We made the Santo Niño in the image of our likeness," historian Ambeth Ocampo said. "In a sense, the Santo Nino was indigenized (better: indio-genized). The foreign was made our own not only as a form of accommodation but also as a pattern of resistance."



# The Leaven of the Gospel

*The evangelization of the Philippines came together with the Spanish occupation as the proclaimed purpose of the colonizers. The pioneers of the Gospel in the country were five religious orders.*

**K**ing Philip of Spain entrusted the great enterprise of the evangelization of the Philippines to the most famous groups of men that had embodied the Christian faith in its radical demands and its missionary drive in other parts of the newly discovered world.

Responsible for the spreading of the Gospel are five religious orders which arrived in the country in different waves in the span of forty years, from 1565 to 1606: Augustinians, Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, and Recollects.

The first evangelists to arrive in the Philippines were the Augustinians in August 1565: Fray Andres de Urdaneta and four others. Later, more religious came to reinforce the first group. The Augustinians landed in Cebu then moved to Manila, Negros, Panay, the Tagalog Region, Pampanga, and the coastal area of Ilocos Region.

## **AN OUTSTANDING PERSONALITY**

It is providential that the first messengers of the Gospel in the Philippines had an outstanding and exemplary personality like Fray Andres de Urdaneta, OSA, as their leader. He was a Spanish Basque explorer who later in life became an Augustinian friar.

The young Urdaneta was the survivor of the Loaisa expedition which circumnavigated the globe after Magellan. Wearied by his many adventures, he later returned to New Spain (Mexico) and there entered the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine.

Urdaneta was considered a great navigator who was fitted for cruising the vast oceans. The king of Spain, Philip II, wanted to give him



the command of the expedition to the Philippines. Urdaneta agreed to accompany the expedition but refused to take command.

Don Miguel López de Legazpi was appointed as commander. The expedition, composed of the Capitana, which carried on board Legazpi and Urdaneta, and other four ships set sail in November 1564.

Urdaneta founded the first churches in the Philippines, St.Vitales and the Basilica of Santo Niño; he served as the first prelate of the Church in Cebu. He was considered the “protector of the Indians” for his treatment of the Filipino natives and their defense against the other Spanish colonizers with the king of Spain.

### **THE RETURN ROUTE: “TORNAVIAJE”**

After spending some time in the islands, Legazpi was determined to remain and sent Urdaneta back to find a better return route and to obtain help from New Spain for the Philippine colony. The return trip from the Philippines to Mexico in 1565 proved to be a milestone in navigational history.

Fray Urdaneta’s ship reached the port of Acapulco, having traveled 12,000 miles in 130 days. Fourteen of the crew had died; only Urdaneta and Felipe de Salcedo had strength enough to cast the anchors. For the following two centuries, Spanish galleons used “Urdaneta’s route” which was called “tornaviaje.”

In the Philippines, the city of Urdaneta in Pangasinan was named after him. The same city is the seat of one of the biggest Catholic dioceses in the country.

The Augustinians were followed by the Franciscans who touched the archipelago in 1577. The contingent was made up of Fray Pedro de Alfaro and 17 others, including 13 priests. They then spread to the

*Friar Andrés  
de Urdaneta is  
considered the first  
prelate of Cebu.*



Tagalog region (Mindoro and Tayabas), Bicol region (Camarines Sur and Norte, Albay, and Sorsogon), and Marinduque. They wrote the Tagalog grammar. They studied the customs, laws, and usages of the natives as well as their rites and ceremonies.

### **CIVIL ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The friars spread through the different islands, starting groups of converts all over the territory. Being few in numbers, sometimes one person alone, they gained the respect and the trust of the indigenous people. They convinced them to settle around the church, the plaza, and the administration buildings. In this way, they gave origin to cities and towns all over the country.

The friars established the hospital, banking, and water systems in the Philippines. They were also involved in the building of infrastructures such as roads, dams, and bridges. All these accomplishments of the friars during the Spanish era are often overlooked in history books.

For example, Fray Felix Huerta, a Franciscan, is remembered only by a street name in Manila, Santa Cruz District. Yet, he was the head of San Lazaro Hospital for Lepers and he founded Monte de Piedad, a combination of savings bank and pawnshop, which was the first agricultural bank of the Philippines. And his greatest achievement was establishing the first water system to supply Manila with safe, potable running water.

Among their religious accomplishments, the beautiful churches of Lucban and Tayabas in Quezon, the ornate ones in Pakil and Paete in Laguna, as well as the massive Naga City Cathedral, San Jose, Sagnay, and the quaint Lagonoy churches in Camarines Sur are just a few of these still extant edifices that the friars built.

*Miguel López de Legazpi, Spanish conquistador.*



# A Story of Intelligence and Sacrifice

*The second wave of pioneers saw the arrival of the Jesuits, the Dominicans, and the Recollects. On the whole, the population accepted Catholicism, settled down, and engaged in agriculture, trade, and education.*

The first Jesuits arrived in Manila from Mexico in 1581. Their Superior was Fr. Andreas Saldeno who arrived with two others. Many others followed. Apart from Manila, they moved to Cavite, Batangas, Laguna, Visayas, and Mindanao. In 1595, the College of Manila and the College of San José were started since, according to their tradition, they excelled in the education apostolate.

They were expelled from the Philippines in 1768 for political reasons that brought the suppression of the Society of Jesus in the world by the pope. They returned in 1859 for the missions of Mindanao and Jolo. Soon after their arrival, the Jesuits began the exploration of their new mission territory.

They set up mission stations, built parishes, opened mission schools, administered the sacraments, and taught children catechism. They wrote the first grammars and compiled the first dictionaries in Maguindanao, Tururay, and Bagobo. However, the people of the capital wanted them because of their skill in education. In 1859 itself the Jesuits took charge of Escuela Pia. This is considered the beginning of the Ateneo de Manila.

The more-than-two-hundred-year presence of the Jesuits in the Philippines is considered an asset: they are remembered as scientists at the Manila Observatory, professors in the different Ateneos, pioneers and explorers in Mindanao, as catechists, pastors, and spiritual guides for many who desired a deeper relationship with their God. Their popularity is witnessed by the many hundreds of Filipino youth who joined and even nowadays belong to their institute.



## LA “NAVAL” DE MANILA

In the year 1581, Fr. Domenico Salazar and Fr. Cristobal de Salva-tierra, the first Dominicans, arrived in Cavite. Fr. Domenico Sala-zar became the first bishop of Manila. Many other Dominican friars kept coming. Apart from Manila and Cavite, they evangelized Bata-an, Pangasinan, Cagayan Valley, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Mountain Province, Batanes and Babuyan island. They brought the devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary.

In Manila, they built the Binondo Church and the Church of Sto. Domingo, now located in Quezon City after the mother church in In-tramuros was destroyed, where the yearly devotion to the “La Naval” is well-attended.

The University of Sto. Tomas (UST) was established in 1611. In 1593, the Dominicans published the first two books of the “Doctrina Cristiana,” one in Chinese and the other in Tagalog and Spanish.

They made the country their base for missionary work in the rest of Asia. One such missionary trip to Japan during the first half of the 17th century saw the martyrdom, among others, of the Filipino-Chinese Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino saint.

The successful evangelization of the province of Cagayan Valley is always pointed out as one of the greatest achievements of the Do-minicans which was obtained after long perseverance, bravery, indus-triousness, sacrifices, and even death. The number of various dialects, the people’s nomadic lifestyle, their propensity for headhunting, the rugged and unknown geographic terrain all posed seemingly uncon-querable hurdles to the young, European missionaries.

It was the Dominican friars who patiently coaxed the people of Cagayan to live peacefully among themselves, give up their arms, practice agriculture, and submit to the Catholic faith. One of the last-

*Cardinal L. A. Tagle  
crowns the image  
of Our Lady of La  
Naval de Manila  
in 2020.  
(Romero)*



ing legacies of Dominicans is the massive brick churches they built in the Cagayan Valley. The best example of this, and perhaps can be said, the peak of Dominican brick architecture is the stunning Tumauni Church in Tumauni, Isabela.

### **MISSION OF THE PERIPHERIES**

In 1606, the first group of 14 Augustinian Recollects arrived in Cebu, headed by Fr. Juan de San Jeronimo. They then proceeded to Intramuros, Manila. Later they spread to Zambales, Mindoro, Romblon, Simara, Tablas, Sibuyan, Masbate, Burian, Ticao, Palawan, Calamianes, Cebu, and Mindanao. They got the most scattered territories since, when they arrived, the islands had already been partitioned among the other religious orders.

The province that was most heavily influenced by the Order is the island of Negros, now divided into two provinces: Occidental and Oriental. Most of the towns in both provinces are named after towns where the missionaries came from in Spain, such as La Carlota, Valencia, and Cádiz.

Life in the missions was quite difficult due to the hostility of the natives, especially in the Zambales areas. The Moro slave raiding was a problem in the remaining evangelical fields and often made life harder since much blood was shed.

All the same, lands were claimed from the forests for agriculture, crops were introduced for food and export, schools were established, roads, bridges, and other infrastructures were constantly built. Everywhere, the friars were also responsible for the importation of new technologies and unknown plants and vegetables from the new world like coffee, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, peanuts, etc... It was a new beginning.



# Religion and Folklore

*The acceptance of Christianity is evident in the festivals which show the popular response to them as an invitation to joy and celebration. In them, faith becomes culture.*

Sometime during the 13th century A.D., a group of Malay chieftains called datu, fleeing from the island of Borneo, settled in the Philippines and were welcomed by the Ati people, the tribes of Panay island.

Sometime later, the Ati people struggled with famine as the result of a bad harvest. They were forced to descend from their mountain villages into the settlement below, to seek the generosity of the people who now lived there. The datu obliged and gave them food. In return, the Ati danced and sang for them, grateful for the gifts they had been given.

The festivity was originally pagan. The Spanish missionaries gradually added a Christian meaning to it. Today, the Ati-Atihan is a huge religious festival celebrating the Santo Niño. The formal opening Mass emphasizes its religious character. The procession leading to the church begins with a rhythmic drumbeat and dances parading along the street.

The dances of the groups, representing different tribes, last for the whole week. The festival ends with a procession of thousands of people carrying torches and different kinds of images of the Santo Niño.

The Ati-Atihan Festival has inspired many other Filipino festivals including the Sinulog of Cebu and Dinagyang of Iloilo City. Legally it holds the title of “Mother of all Filipino Festivals.”

## **THE SINULOG OF CEBU**

The Sinulog-Santo Niño Festival is an annual cultural and religious festival held on the third Sunday of January in Cebu City and is the center of the Santo Niño Catholic celebrations in the Philippines. The



Sinulog is considered to be the best festival in the Philippines, with every celebration routinely attracting around one to two million people from all over the country and even from abroad every year.

The word *sinulog* comes from the Cebuano word *sulog* which roughly means “running water.” It describes the forward-backward movement of the Sinulog dance. The dance consists of two steps forward and one step backward, done to the sound of drums. This movement resembles the current (*sulog*) of Cebu’s Pahina River.

According to historical accounts, the Cebu natives already danced the Sinulog in honor of their animist idols long before the arrival of Magellan. Today the Sinulog commemorates the Filipino people’s acceptance of Christianity (specifically, Roman Catholicism), and the removal of their former animist beliefs.

### **DANCE STEPS**

On March 16, 1521, the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan arrived and planted the cross on the shores of Cebu. He presented the image of the Child Jesus to the newly-baptized Queen Juana as they celebrated the conversion of Rajah Humabon and more than 800 of his people.

This event is frequently used as the basis for most Sinulog dances, which dramatize the coming of the Spaniards and the presentation of the Santo Niño to the Queen. A popular theme among Sinulog dances is Queen Juana holding the Santo Niño in her arms and using it to bless her people who were often afflicted with sickness believed to be caused by demons and other evil spirits.

The Sinulog dance steps are believed to originate from Rajah Humabon’s adviser, Baladhay. When Baladhay fell sick, Humabon ordered

to bring him into a room where the Santo Niño was enthroned, along with the other pagan gods of the native Cebuanos. After a few days passed, Baladhay was heard shouting and was found dancing with lively alertness.

Pointing to the image of the Santo Niño, Baladhay explained that he had found on top of him a small child trying to wake him up. Awake, Baladhay danced with the little child and explained that he was dancing the movements of the river. To this day, the two-steps forward, one-step backward movement is still used by Santo Niño devotees who believe that it was the Santo Niño's choice to have Baladhay dance in such a manner.

### **PIETY AND CULTURE**

Since the 16th century, there has been a great devotion to the Santo Niño in the Filipino popular piety, particularly in the Visayas. Pilgrims from different parts of Cebu and the rest of the Philippines make their yearly journey to the basilica to take part in the processions and festival.

The coming of Christianity and the devotion to the Santo Niño is also celebrated by the Dinagyang Festival of Iloilo, whereas the Moriones Festival in Marinduque is linked to the Passion of Jesus and takes place during the Holy Week. Belonging to the Christmas Season is instead the original Festival of the Giant Lantern of San Fernando, Pampanga.

The festivals are witness to the Enculturation of Christianity in the Filipino people and how the naturally festive character of the population has found in the joyful message of the Gospel a reason for gigantic communal expressions of vitality and joy.



# The Most Distinguished Legacy

*Christianity has spread education everywhere. The University of Santo Tomas (UST), the first university of its kind in Asia, the Ateneo de Manila, La Salle, San Beda and many others, have been and are part of the life of the Philippines as a nation.*

**O**n April 28 2011, Pope Benedict XVI gave a rare apostolic blessing, via video, while tens of thousands of candles blazed and the University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila, Philippines, began its fifth century of existence amid pageantry and prayers for more birthdays to come.

Speaking from his Vatican desk, the Pope paid tribute to Asia's oldest university for having played a significant role in the Catholic Church: "I am confident that, keeping in mind the faith and the reason which are always part of a truly integrated approach to education, the University will continue to contribute to the intellectual, spiritual and cultural enrichment of the Philippines and beyond".

The Pope's words were the climax of UST's quadricentennial celebrations at the university grandstand and open grounds. Thousands of students, faculty members and alumni from different parts of the world and across all professions and vocations lit their candles at the bidding of Rector Magnificus, Fr. Rolando V. de la Rosa, OP.

Fr. De la Rosa urged Thomasians to be like the star of Bethlehem that led everyone to Jesus our Lord and to renew their Thomasian vow to spread the light and to be the light of the world. A crowd, estimated at around 100,000 sang the UST hymn, asking God to continue showering the institution with unending grace.

The Pope paid tribute to the UST founder, the Spanish Dominican Friar Miguel de Benavides, the third archbishop of Manila, and the Dominican Order that established UST in 1611 and continue to administer it.



The Mass was marked with splendor as Cardinal Zenon Grocholewsky, papal legate, made his entrance along with Cardinals Gaudencio Rosales and Ricardo Vidal; hundreds of bishops, a majority of whom are UST alumni, and numberless priests and religious among the throng of faithful.

The image of the Santissimo Rosario, Our Lady of the Rosary, made its entrance earlier, fully vested in royal robes and with a huge crown on its head. Our Lady of the Rosary is the patron saint of the UST church, since the Dominicans promoted the rosary devotion from the start of their mission.

### **THE PRIDE OF THE JESUITS**

The founding of the Ateneo de Manila University has its roots in the history of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) as a teaching order in the Philippines. The first Spanish Jesuits to arrive were custodians of the *ratio studiorum*, the Jesuit system of education developed around 1559.

Within a decade of their arrival, the Jesuits founded the Colegio de Manila in Intramuros. The Colegio formally opened in 1595 as the first school in the Philippines. The promising developments were interrupted by the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773.

In 1859, the Jesuits came back to the Philippines and took over the Escuela Municipal, a small private school maintained for some 30 children of Spanish residents. Ten Spanish Jesuit priests and a Jesuit brother began operating the school on December 10, 1859. The Ateneo de Manila University considers this its foundation day.

The school kept developing and improving. Fr. Francisco Araneta, S.J. was appointed as the Ateneo de Manila's first Filipino Rector in 1958. In 1959, its centennial year, the Ateneo became a university. Since then, the institution has spread enormously, adding always new faculties.

*Fr. Jose Mesa, S.J.  
with Ateneo de  
Davao Junior High  
School Principal, Fr.  
Mike Pineda, S.J.*



On August 21, 1983, Ateneo alumnus Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr. was assassinated upon his return from exile in the United States. On February 11, 1986, alumnus and Antique Governor Evelio Javier was gunned down. Two weeks later, Ateneans joined thousands of Filipinos from all walks of life in the peaceful uprising at EDSA which ousted Ferdinand Marcos.

## QUALITY EDUCATION

Ateneo has produced two Nobel Peace Prize nominees, two Ramon Magsaysay awardees, and José Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines. Several Philippine presidents, including former President Benigno Aquino III and his predecessors Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Fidel Ramos, and Corazon Aquino, are alumni or have ties with the University. Judges, congressmen, senators, scientists, artists and church leaders are the fruits of the quality education imparted in the Ateneo.

Other famous Catholic universities include De la Salle, San Beda, Adamson, the University of the Assumption in San Fernando, Pampanga; the University of San José, Recollects, in Cebu City; the University of the Immaculate Conception in Davao City; Notre Dame University in Cotabato City and numberless others.

The world needs good artists and good scientists, but a scientific outlook becomes dangerously narrow if it ignores the religious and ethical dimension of life just as religion becomes narrow if it rejects the legitimate contribution of science to our understanding of the world.

Indeed, throughout the centuries, Catholic universities have greatly contributed and continue to contribute to the educational, cultural and religious development of the young people of the Philippines.



# *Salamat, Mama Mary!*

*The love of the Filipino people for the Blessed Virgin Mary is well-known and gives origin to devotional practices like “Simbang Gabi” and “Flores de Mayo.” But the most evident feature is the existence of the Marian shrines and their role in the history and the life of the nation.*

**T**he story of Our Lady of La Naval de Manila is exemplary of the importance of Marian devotion in the evangelization of the Philippines.

The devotion to La Naval started out of the people’s concrete experience of danger from a powerful Protestant Dutch armada that threatened to seize the Philippines, which by then had embraced the Catholic faith brought to the islands by the Spanish colonizers.

The much inferior Filipino-Spanish warriors managed to sink the more powerful warships and the indubitable fighting spirit of the Dutch to the bottom of the sea through five encounters that took place from March 15 to October 4, 1646.

While the lopsided exchange of skirmishes was raging, Filipinos and Spaniards were having a procession along the streets of Intramuros, unceasingly praying the rosary. Attributing the feat to the intercession of our Lady, the people started to hold the novena prayers each year to celebrate the victory and to remind themselves that Our Lady of La Naval wanted them to hold on and to deepen their Catholic faith.

## **ANCIENT IVORY ICON**

La Naval de Manila is the oldest, grandest and most historically significant Philippine-made ivory icon. It was made in Binondo during the early Spanish era by a Chinese man who converted to the faith after its creation. The artistry of the image itself contributes to the spontaneity of the devotion.

The elaborate crown, the exquisite gown, and the chiseled symmetry of the Lady’s face and Baby Jesus are a feast for the eyes. It



has been considered miraculous many times in the four centuries of its existence.

Thousands of people usually take part in the grand procession from Sto. Domingo Church, with the floats carrying the statues of many saints, accompanied by band music and prayers. Bishops figure prominently in the yearly celebrations as preachers and Mass presiders which helps the devotion to abide by orthodoxy and sobriety.

### **AN INSTRUMENT OF PROTEST**

Marian devotion can be and was at times an instrument of protest. An example is its contribution to the dismantling of Marcos' dictatorship that kept the country under martial law for over two decades. The abuses reached their apex with the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983. His remains, together with the bloody clothes he wore on the tarmac after the fatal shooting, were carefully laid near the altar of Our Lady of La Naval de Manila in Sto. Domingo Church.

Three years later, when people trooped to EDSA, the image of La Naval de Manila was also in the middle of the rallies inspiring the people. There were no guns, no bullets, and no violence in those rallies. Instead, rosaries were held by the Catholic faithful in their bare hands as the image of Our Lady of La Naval stood aloft in its silver float.

### **OTHER MARIAN SHRINES**

Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary is also venerated in Pangasinan. The ivory and silver image which bears this title dates back from the

16th century and is presently enshrined within the Minor Basilica of Manaoag. The shrine is a major pilgrimage site in the country and is administered, like La Naval de Manila, by the Order of Preachers, within the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan.

Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, also known as Our Lady of Antipolo, is a 17th-century Roman Catholic wooden image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The image, a Black Madonna that represents the Immaculate Conception, is enshrined in Antipolo Cathedral.

The image was brought to the country from Mexico by the galleon *El Almirante* in 1626. The safe voyage across the Pacific Ocean was attributed to the image, which was given the title of “Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage.”

The title was proven true later by six other successful voyages of the Manila-Acapulco Galleons with the image aboard as its patroness. The statue is one of the most celebrated images of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Philippines, gaining devotees since the mid-19th century, having been mentioned by José Rizal in his writings.

Our Lady of Peñafrancia is venerated in Naga City, Bicol. The image comes from the original image enshrined in Salamanca, Spain. It is currently housed at the Peñafrancia Basilica. Every September, the novena festivities are held in honor of the image as the principal Patroness and Queen of Bicol.

Marian devotion is born of a people’s faith across the centuries. The Filipino people are rightly called “un pueblo amante de Maria” (a people who love the Virgin Mary).



# Common Joy

*The life of the Filipino villages and parishes is built around the “fiesta,” a yearly celebration of the Patron Saint which includes the preparations, the solemn Mass, the procession with the images of the Saint, the cooking, and the hospitality.*

Every town in the Philippines, no matter how big or small, holds a *fiesta*. Traditionally, the *fiesta* is a time of joyful celebration for Filipinos, who cook heaps of hearty food, throw open their doors to visitors, and parade in the streets. Some Filipino *fiestas* have evolved into elaborate, multi-day festivals, while others have kept their community roots.

Majayjay is a municipality in the province of Laguna. It is located at the foot of Mount Banahaw and stands 1000 feet above sea level, 120 kilometers south of Manila. The Spanish colonial government made it a town in 1578.

Its location at the foot of the mountain gives it an abundant supply of fresh mountain spring water. Four rivers flow through the town. In Rizal's *El Filibusterismo*, he spoke of an old Spanish bridge made of stone in the year 1851. Puente de Capricio was initiated by the Spanish Franciscan friar, Victoriano del Moral, who was cruel and autocratic. Anyone who did not labor in the construction would be later punished by a whipping in the buttocks.

The bridge is still standing firm today, crossing the Olla River. It is called *Tulay ng Pige* (Bridge of Buttocks). The bridge now symbolizes the defiance of Filipino workers against the oppressive Spanish colonialists. At the same time, it is the pride of the inhabitants of Majayjay.

## **SENSE OF BELONGING**

The town is home to one of the oldest and most beautiful Roman Catholic churches in the Philippines, the Saint Gregory the Great Parish Church. It was built in 1575 but destroyed several times by fire. Its



restoration dates back to 1730. Despite the repeated incidents of fire, the image of their Patron Saint, San Gregorio Magno, remained miraculously unscathed.

The SaGreMa Festival (San Gregorio Magno Majayjay) marks the parochial *fiesta* celebrated on September 3 and March 12, the dates when Saint Gregory became a pope and the day he died, respectively. At this time of the year, the 30,000 inhabitants come together for a grand celebration.

The extensive ceremonies are planned by a committee that is usually led by the *hermana Mayor* (the big sister). The local bishop is usually invited as the main celebrant of the solemn Mass. A colorful procession follows during which all the statues of saints are taken around the town in their floats, with the joyful sound of the local brass band.

The *fiesta* is a time during which the villagers take pride in their patron saint, in the beauty of their place of worship, and their place in general. Overseas Filipino workers often make it a point to come back to their town for the *fiesta*. It is when food is abundant, the hospitality is warm, and the sense of belonging grows strong.

## THE SUCCESS OF EVANGELIZATION

The cohesion and normality of the village life and festivities are today taken for granted, but serious historians see in them the success of the evangelizing activity of the Spanish friars who are responsible for the organization of the village life around the parish church and the plaza.

*Catholic devotees  
dance and perform  
in the annual Feast  
of the Child Jesus  
parade in Cebu City.*

*(Patrimonio Designs  
Limited | Dreamstime)*



William Cameron Forbes, a Protestant Governor-General of the Philippines (1909-1913), cannot hide his admiration at the endurance of the Spaniard's evangelizing mission when he said; "Whatever their method may have been, no fair-minded person could underrate their achievements in dealing with the disunited, warring factions and tribes which they found inhabiting the Philippine Islands in 1565 and in giving them a unity of thoughts which comes from a common religion to which they are devoted and to the maintenance of which they have erected their most impressive and monumental buildings, where worship is conducted according to the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church."

The feasts of the patron saints have developed, in some places, into festivals like the Sinulog of Cebu and the Ati-Atihan of Kalibo in Aklan. The province of Quezon in Luzon Island has one of the most interesting *fiestas* in the Philippines. On May 15, Lucban and the towns nearby decorate their homes with fruits and vegetables in honor of San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of farmers.

A walk through the town reveals houses covered in all types of fresh produce. The festival is a way of giving thanks for a bountiful harvest, and the best-decorated house wins a prize. Toward the end of the festival, visitors are allowed to bring a basket and pick the fruits and veggies from the houses for free. The success of the religious festivals has inspired the other great cultural manifestations linked with nature like the annual "Flower Festival or Panagbenga" of Baguio and the kind of carnival with masks "Maskara" of Bacolod.



# Tough Love

*Popular devotion in the Philippines presents some features which demand bodily suffering that can reach an extreme extent like flagellations, the yearly “transfer” of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo in Manila, and the crucifixions in Pampanga.*

**T**he *Simbang Gabi* or Night Worship, the original and traditional Filipino Christmas Novena, requires the sacrifice of rising very early for nine days, but this does not discourage the crowds that gather early in the morning, when it is still dark, and fill the churches to capacity yearly.

True love implies sacrifice and makes it sweet. In the case of the *Simbang Gabi*, it makes the observance demanding but also sweet, because of the many people gathered together to fortify their sense of community.

Historically, the reason for the early rising may have been that the farmers had to be in the field in the early morning, and so the Novena had to take place even earlier in order to give everybody the chance to participate.

Nowadays, it is only the sacrifice of rising in the middle of the night that appeals to the masses who, for the space of nine days, experience the life of monks. But it is in other devotions that the personal abnegation can reach the extent of torture and bloodletting.

## **THE BLACK NAZARENE**

The Black Nazarene is the life-sized image of a dark-skinned, kneeling Jesus Christ carrying the Cross, enshrined in the Basilica of the same name, in the Quiapo district of the city of Manila.

The Black Nazarene was carved by an unknown artist from dark wood in Mexico and then transported to the Philippines in 1606. It was housed in several churches in Manila before arriving in Quiapo Church in 1787, where it has been enshrined ever since.



The icon is renowned in the Philippines and is considered by many Filipino Catholics to be miraculous; merely touching it is reputed to cure a disease. It attracts homage by innumerable devotees and major processions every year.

Religious veneration of the Black Nazarene is rooted among Filipinos who identify themselves with the passion and suffering of Christ which the image depicts. Many devotees of the Black Nazarene relate their poverty and daily struggles to the Passion of Christ as represented by the image.

### **THE “TRASLACIÓN”**

The January 9 procession re-enacts the image’s “Traslación” (literally “transfer”) in 1787 to the Minor Basilica from its original shrine inside Intramuros. It is the largest procession, drawing tens of thousands of devotees longing to touch the icon, and lasting more than twenty hours. All devotees wear maroon and yellow like the image, and they walk barefoot as a form of penance and in emulation of Christ’s walk to Golgotha.

The “Traslación” is also notorious for the casualties that result from the jostling and congestion of the crowds trying to touch the image with cloths or the cords used to pull the vehicle carrying it. The injuries and even deaths of devotees are brought upon by one or several factors including heat, fatigue, or being trampled upon by the crowd.

Authorities estimate that over half a million devotees usually stride barefoot in the procession, while the almost week-long event is attended by million of people.

### **FLAGELLATIONS AND CRUCIFIXIONS**

Crucifixion in the Philippines is a devotional practice held every Good Friday and is part of the local observance of Holy Week mostly in the

*Religious  
procession of the  
Black Nazarene  
or “Traslación.”*

*(Dalogdog, Ramos  
and Lagarde)*

Pampanga province area. Some devotees are willingly crucified in imitation of Jesus Christ's suffering and death, while related practices include carrying a wooden cross, crawling on rough pavement, and self-flagellation.

The nailing on the cross is done by long nails which transfix the palms of the hands with considerable bloodletting. The extent of the suffering is, however, controlled by moderate traditional forms.

I have personally witnessed the slow advancing of a single flagellant on a frequented road during the Holy Week. He had his chest bare and kept striking his back with a whip made of several strands with razor blades tied to the ends. The bloodletting was limited and the whole thing appeared as something which tradition had accepted and, at the same time, controlled.

Penitents consider these acts to be mortification of the flesh, and undertake these to ask forgiveness for sins, to fulfill a vow, or to express gratitude for favors granted. Given our consumerist, pleasure-seeking mentality where bodily sacrifice is shunned, the existence of these practices in the Philippines makes a welcome exception, even in their extreme form.

These customs are strongly discouraged by the Catholic Church in the Philippines, which considers them to be fanatical, superstitious expressions of folk Catholicism and self-harm contrary to its teachings on the body.

Given the limited extension of the phenomenon, its long historical tradition, and its tourists' attraction, it is not forbidden by law. The Department of Health, however, often insists that participants in the rites should have tetanus shots and that the nails used should be sterilized.



# Holy Rebellions

*In the 19th century, violent rebellions against the colonial government involving Church personnel broke out. They were motivated not by insubordination but by strong, legitimate demand for equal treatment.*

**T**he general, peaceful acceptance of the evangelizers among the people, mainly friars of different orders who were often demanding and severe disciplinarians, is manifested by the fact that we have no record of violent reactions against Church personnel in history, although they were generally few in any given place and living among the native population without protection.

Two rebellions of some importance happened in the 19th century: they are the story of Apolinario de la Cruz (Hermano Pule) with the extermination of the Cofradia de San José on November 4, 1841, and the execution of three Filipino priests: Gomez, Burgos and Zamora (Gomburza) on February 17, 1872.

In both cases, it was not a rebellion against Spain, the motherland, but the urgent and strong request to be accepted as equal citizens and treated in a just way: they expressed the need for a sense of belonging. Because of this, we can call these rebellions “holy.” The savage reaction of the Spanish authorities created martyrs and prepared the way for independence.

## **HERMANO PULE**

During the Spanish colonial period, Catholic religious orders refused to admit native Filipinos as members. Apolinario de la Cruz (known by his followers as Hermano Pule) was a member of the *indios* (native population of the Philippines). After several unsuccessful attempts of joining religious orders, together with an *indio* member of the secular clergy, Fr. Ciriaco de los Sanctos, he founded the Cofradia de San José, a religious order exclusively for *indios*.



During its peak, the Cofradía had about 5,000 members from the provinces of Tayabas, Batangas, and Laguna. Although approval was eagerly sought, the Church authority never understood or took seriously the Cofradia.

Fearing an armed rebellion, the Spanish colonial government sent military forces to suppress the Cofradía, an attack that was resisted by Hermano Pule and his followers on October 23, 1841. However, more troops were sent and the Cofradía was finally quelled by colonial military forces on November 1, 1841. Pule was then captured, tried, and executed.

### **THE SECULARIZATION CONTROVERSY**

Two kinds of priests served the Catholic Church in the Philippines. These were the regulars and the seculars. Regular priests belonged to religious orders. Historically, their main task was to spread Christianity which they did valiantly.

Secular priests did not belong to any religious order. They were trained specifically to run the parishes and were under the supervision of the bishops. A royal decree was issued on November 9, 1774, providing for the secularization of all parishes or the transfer of parochial administration from the regular friars to the secular priests.

The regulars resented the move because they considered the Filipinos unfit for the priesthood. Among other reasons, they cited the Filipinos' brown skin, lack of education, and inadequate experience. They neglected the Catholic principle that no church can rest upon a substantial basis unless it is manned by a native clergy.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the Jesuit missionaries who had come after Fr. Matthew Ricci had already evangelized and bap-



tized hundreds of thousands of Chinese people and were present in all the main Chinese cities. Then the condemnation of the Chinese rites came as well as the suppression of the Society of Jesus, and the Christian masses found themselves suddenly without priests.

This brought about the dissolution of the church due to the lack of promotion of the local clergy. It is a pattern that, unfortunately, repeats itself even in our time.

## MARTYRS OF INDEPENDENCE

On February 17, 1872, Fathers Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora (Gomburza), all Filipino priests, were executed by the Spanish colonizers on charges of subversion. It was alleged that Fathers Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora were complicit in the uprising of workers at the Cavite Naval Yard.

In reality, they incurred the hatred of Spanish authorities for fighting for equal rights among priests and leading the campaign against the Spanish friars. They fought on the issue of secularization in the Philippines that led to the conflict of religious and church seculars.

A proof of their innocence is the fact that the Church authority never touched their clerical status. They were outstanding clergymen and as such, they remained even in front of the executioners.

Their execution had a profound effect on many late 19th-century Filipinos. José Rizal, later to become the country's national hero, dedicated his novel *El Filibusterismo* to their memory. Mutiny by workers in the Cavite Naval Yard was the pretext needed by the authorities to redress a perceived humiliation from the principal objective which threatened the established order. In this way, they made them martyrs of Filipino independence.

*José Rizal, later to  
become the country's  
national hero,  
dedicated his novel  
El Filibusterismo to  
their memory.*



# Christianity and the Filipino Identity

*The fact that Christianity arrived and developed together with the colonial domination of the Spaniards has constituted a problem for the identity of the Filipino people.*

42 **S**r. Mary Catherine Loreto, Sr. Mary Conception Conti, Sr. Mary Consuelo Chuidian, and Sr. Mary Virginia Gonzaga, Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS), in 1983, were on board the ferry M/V Dona Cassandra when it sank off the north-eastern Mindanao coast. These women of God did something brave and heroic. At sea, as the ship was sinking, they prayed, distributed life vests, helped women and children, and gave instructions to the other passengers on what to do, completely forgetful of their safety.

On land, they had been fearless female religious and rural missionaries who worked among the oppressed, the indigenous, the farmers, and Muslims in remote areas of Mindanao. In life, they were street parliamentarians, health providers, counselors, and educators. In death, they were witnesses of the supreme sacrifice of Jesus of the Cross.

Like many thousands of others throughout the centuries, they continued what the early Spanish missionaries achieved, the Spanish friars who were the “real conquerors; they who, without any arms than their virtues, gained over the will of the islanders,” (from the narrative of Tomàs de Comyn) and with bare hands planted the master seed of the Gospel in our midst.

## **A NECESSARY DISTINCTION**

To critics who see the coming of Christianity as “the start of the country’s subjugation,” Bishop Pablo David counters that, through time, Filipinos have learned to distinguish between the Christian faith and Spanish colonialism. He cited the three Filipino clergymen: Fathers Mariano Gomez, José Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora, collectively known as Gomburza, as among the patriots who had



shed their blood in the struggle against the Spaniards.

“At some point, the faith that Filipinos had embraced was no longer alien to them. It had succeeded in taking root in the fertile ground of our innate spirituality,” Bishop David said. But still, not everybody can make the distinction between the two; even clever people fail to see the wisdom of the distinction.

The national hero, José Rizal, and contemporary outstanding writer and poet, Nick Joaquin, have embodied this wisdom. José Rizal, himself had made that distinction; otherwise, he would not have dedicated his second novel to the Gomburza.

Like Padre Burgos and Padre Pelàez, the National Hero fought for reforms with his pen. In front of extreme threat, in the morning of the execution, he attended Mass, received communion, recited the rosary with his family, and died reconciled with God and his enemies.

## **CULTURE AND REALITY**

Monsignor Sabino Vengco believes that the Christian faith has not lodged deeply in the Filipino psyche: “We have been nominally Catholic since the Spanish period. It is never a case of conversion but rather political accommodation. There is not much depth in our faith. We are satisfied with what is superficial.”

Others often ask as to why our Christianity doesn’t seem to make a difference in our attitudes towards extra-judicial killings, human rights, and corruption in high places. The answer - they say - is that there is a great disconnect between private piety and public duty because Christianity has yet to be made at home in our context.

These people have a too simplistic view of life. The relationship between culture and reality is complex and not easy, too clear-cut answer is misleading.

*Youngsters selling  
the national flag  
of the Philippines  
at Luneta Park.*

*(Dreamstime)*

## NICK JOAQUIN

The problem of identity was central in Nick Joaquín's works. Already this is present in *La Naval de Manila* which tells of a Manila religious celebration built on the tradition that the Blessed Virgin had miraculously intervened in the Spanish victory over a Dutch invasion fleet in 1646.

The work sets forth a major theme Joaquín would develop in the years ahead: that the Filipino nation was formed in the matrix of Spanish colonialism and Catholic devotion and that it was important for Filipinos to appreciate their Spanish past. He wrote: "The content of our national destiny is ours to create, but the basic form, the temper, the physiognomy, Spain created for us."

This peaceful appreciation of the contribution of the Catholic religion did not blind Joaquín who wrote: "The Christian Filipino winces when he hears his country described as the only Christian nation in the Far East. He looks around, sees only greed, graft, vileness, and violence. Questioning the value of religious instruction, he sneers: Is this Christianity?" We can remember the definition of a famous writer about Italy: "This is a Catholic country that struggles to be Christian."

This tension between culture and reality in living the faith is a common problem and doesn't allow a simple solution. Bishop Caccia, while papal nuncio in the Philippines, asked us, a gathering of missionaries: "According to you, what makes the Filipino people, a Catholic country?"

The answer was: the devotions, i.e. the successful enculturation of the Christian message in the communal manifestations of the Filipino people. Popular religion is not to be underestimated. When it disappears, the faith often disappears as well.



# Mission to the World

*The more than ten million Filipinos abroad carry around their Catholic faith with their special way of praying and celebrating. In this way, everywhere, they are reviving the local churches where they worship.*

On Gaudete Sunday, December 15, 2019, something extraordinary happened to the thousands of Filipino faithful living and working in Rome. Pope Francis celebrated Mass on the first day of the Filipino Christmas tradition, the *Simbang Gabi* or Christmas Novena, in St. Peter's Basilica.

It was the first time that a pope celebrated *Simbang Gabi* at the Vatican. The *Simbang Gabi* tradition in the Philippines dates back to the 17th century. Filipinos hang a star outside their homes and attend early morning Masses for nine days before Christmas.

"In recent decades, thanks to Filipino migrants, this devotion has crossed national borders and has arrived in many other countries. *Simbang Gabi* has also been celebrated in the diocese of Rome for years, and today we celebrate it together here, in St. Peter's Basilica," Pope Francis said.

The Pope told the Filipino community gathered in St. Peter's Basilica that they are called to be "leaven" in their parish communities in Italy and encouraged them to share their "cultural and spiritual wealth."

Over 170,000 Filipinos are residing in Italy. Fr. Ricky Gente, the chaplain for the Filipino community in Rome, addressed Pope Francis at the end of one Mass: "Almost 500 years ago, European missionaries planted the seed of faith in our beloved Philippines. We are happy and blessed because after five centuries, we are here in Europe and throughout the world transmitting the joy and beauty of the Gospel," Fr. Gente said.



## “SMUGGLERS OF THE FAITH”

“Yes, it is true, we carry with us everywhere we go the torch of faith and of the Gospel in the world, the same faith, and Gospel that have been transmitted to us. This is why today, here in front of you, you find happy and smiling people because the flame of faith continues to burn intensely in our hearts,” he added. Pope Francis himself had happily called the Filipino Catholic working abroad: “Smugglers of the Faith.”

Christianity has historically struggled to put down spiritual roots in Asia despite missionary presence in China and Japan. So what makes it stick in the Philippines? Much credit belongs to the religious zeal of the Spanish missionaries. But by and large, the faith thrives today because Filipinos appropriated Catholicism to make it their religion.

The Jesuit historian John Schumacher claims “no whole people, at least before the 19th century, has ever been so thoroughly evangelized as were the Filipinos in the history of the Church.” The Christianization of the country was certainly a change of heart of the people; the conversion, however, included a systematic shift in lifestyle.

Various documents of the Catholic Church in the Philippines assume that the Catholic faith is part and parcel of being Filipino. This idea overlooks the presence of other religious minorities in the country. But the assumption makes sociological sense. Catholicism has become a cultural attribute, given the extent to which it affects everyday Filipino life.

## AT SANTA PUDENZIANA

Every Sunday, at the Basilica of Santa Pudenziana, in Rome, before the noon Mass, the church courtyard is filled with Filipinos, many

*Filipino Catholics  
sing during Mass at  
St. Joseph Church  
in Beirut, Lebanon.*

*(CNS)*



greeting each other in various languages after a week of not seeing one another. Some have their children along, speaking Italian. There is a stall to one side of the courtyard with volunteers selling *arroz caldo* (rice porridge), *pancit* (noodles), *puto cuchinta* (rice cakes), and boiled peanuts.

A Filipino priest starts the Mass in Pilipino and continues through the singing and the readings. The Mass ends, and all shuffle out, the familiar Filipino languages echoing in the Roman church and even louder as people walk out to a sunny courtyard.

One can attribute the weekly packed crowd to lonely immigrants needing camaraderie with their people. It is, however, more than that.

The Filipinos still seek a sacred space to get some bearing amid the harshness they go through to find peace. This need is answered in the churches they flock to each Sunday. Their sacrifices and suffering are heard and succored by a God who will seemingly never fail them.

It is the same worldwide, where overseas Filipino workers far from home, endure countless trials to help their families. Twenty years ago, I witnessed the commitment of the Filipino community in the Parish of Golders Green in London. Their group was side by side with the other national groups like the Italians and Ghanaians.

The local British faithful were already a minority, and the wisdom of the Parish Priest made all groups welcome and foster a warm international atmosphere. It was already a symbol of the Church of the future.





**Fr. Lorenzo Carraro** was born on October 12, 1937 in Venice, Italy. When he was already a second year student of theology in the diocesan seminary, in 1959, he joined the Comboni Missionaries. Ordained on April 7 1962, he lived a varied missionary life in Uganda for 23 years, in London forming new missionaries and in the Philippines since 1999 to the present. He continues to be active in services of spiritual direction, preaching retreats and as a faithful writer collaborating with World Mission magazine.





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