

# **Disobedient but Faithful.**

## **An Argument Against the Classic View of the Priest in the Period of Spanish Rule in the Philippines**

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### **The Classic View**

The priest, particularly the Spanish friar, has been represented in the standard studies of the Philippines between 1565 and 1898 as seemingly omnipotent and omnipresent. Indeed I subscribed to this view myself when I did my research and doctoral writing on the history of Samar in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I would label this pervasive viewpoint as the classic view, easily summed up in the statement that “the parish priest ‘had by necessity to be all for all,’ to be present ‘in all aspects of social life ... in all that happened’ in the *pueblo*.”<sup>1</sup>

As a foreign observer suggested, the classic view included both local power and the role of the parish priest as buffer between the Filipino and the provincial governor:<sup>2</sup> “... the *Padre* is the only resort against the brutality of a[n *alcalde*] mayor who does not understand them: on every occasion he serves them as defender and interpreter. Woe to the [*alcalde*] mayor who does not know his place and does not know how to get into the good graces of such an influential man.” Another

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Cruikshank, *Samar: 1768-1898* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1985), 63; quoting Lorenzo Pérez, O.F.M., *Los Franciscanos en las Islas Filipinas* (Vich: Editorial Seráfica, 1929), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Mallat, *The Philippines History, Geography, Customs, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce of the Spanish Colonies in Oceania*, trans. Pura Santillan-Castreñe and Lina S. Castreñe (Manila: The National Historical Institute, 1983 (1<sup>st</sup> published in 1846)), 249.

observer saw the Spanish priest as totally self-less and —unbelievably — as apolitical.<sup>3</sup>

The life of these good fathers is a genuine sacrifice and one cannot but admire their complete self-denial; among them, no wars of the pen, no politics or differences of opinion; they rise above worldly things and busy themselves only with teaching the millions of natives.

And, finally, here is a statement from one of the outstanding scholars on the church in the Philippines, restating the essential components of this classical view — intermediary and defender, consultant and censor, peacemaker and teacher, as well as a paternalistic enforcer of social proprieties:<sup>4</sup>

In this tranquil and peaceful situation, the parish priest, most generally a Spanish Friar, was in an ideal sense, the father of his parish. All looked to him for advice on the principal decisions of life, advice which was generally more precept than suggestion. The Padre was the defender of his people against the exactions and rapacity of the *alcaldes-mayores*, and other government officials who might chance to visit a provincial town on some rare occasion. It was with the advice and approval of the Padre that the *principalía* made their decisions for the government of the town; it was to the Padre that the *cabezas de barangay* went to get approval of their tax lists; it was the Padre whom the *gobernadorcillo*, who as often as not could not read Spanish, asked to translate the orders which came from the government in Manila or from the provincial capital; and it was the Padre who told him how they were to be carried out, and what reply was to be made. The Padre it was who settled the disputes which arose among his people, who more often than not provided for the schooling of the children in default of the government, who saw to it that the young men and women married at a suitable age, and often perhaps even arranged the match between them. He was the father of his people, for, as numerous Friars insisted in their writings 'los indios son niños grandes' and had to be treated as such.

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<sup>3</sup> J. de Man, *Recollections of a Voyage to the Philippines*, trans. E. Aguilar Cruz (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1984), 42. Even a cursory look at standard accounts of the Spanish period of Philippine history should have dissuaded Man from the silly statement of "no wars of the pen."

<sup>4</sup> John N. Schumacher, S.J., "Some Historical Considerations on the Evangelization of the Philippines," *Contemporary Studies*, 2:4 (December, 1965), 227-28.

## Fundamentally Marginal

In what way do I differ with this traditional or classic view of the parish priest in the Spanish Philippines? I now recognize that in my previous work I had committed a cardinal historical error and made a conflation that was illogical. In short, I had committed the error of mistaking reality for what participants and partisans described as reality. Moreover, I had illogically equated the centrality of faith in the Filipino experience with the centrality of the parish priest. My sense today is that the parish priest in the Philippines, friar or not, Spaniard or not, was fundamentally marginal to the lives and activities of the bulk of the people in the pueblos and in the hills. There might be exceptions on an individual basis, but for most Filipinos the priest would be a figure usually seen from a distance, a resource during certain life crises or rites of passage, possibly a dangerous enemy, but usually peripheral to the actual lives and daily activities of most Filipinos in the lowlands or in the mountains. Miguel A. Bernad, S.J. has said that "it is not possible to exaggerate [the Friars'] importance to Philippine life in the three centuries and a half of the Spanish era."<sup>5</sup> I will argue that exaggeration indeed has been the standard view. Henceforth the role of the parish priest must be nuanced, contextualized, or perhaps even have some of its traditional components discarded.

We see again and again in the literature complaints from friars (that is, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, or Recollects) regarding unsuccessful attempts to resettle lowland and highland Filipinos in and around the church, concerns with gambling and drunkenness, laments regarding unorthodox Filipino religious beliefs and practices operating within or alongside of the world tradition of Roman Catholic Christianity, even to admonitions that they admit were not heeded about groom service or family members all sleeping side by side on a mat in one room. Furthermore, clerical attempts to get all Filipinos to attend Mass and confess at least once a year seem to have been of limited success.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Miguel A. Bernad, S.J., *The Christianization of the Philippines: Problems and Perspectives* (Manila: The Filipiniana Book Guild, 1972), 220.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Owen has observed that "the hold of the Church was much less strong in nineteenth-century Tiguaon than our usual impression of Philippine society under Spanish rule would suggest.... the Church did not dominate even those aspects of the public life of Tiguaon it most assiduously recorded ... apparently they did not feel constrained to abide consistently by all the rules of the Church, even with regard to the sacraments." While he continues by observing that "in Nagcarlan... the influence and

The persistence of friar complaints about intractable Filipino practices immediately signals that the parish priest was not such a dominant political and social force in the pueblo as the literature usually suggests.<sup>7</sup> The picture instead is that the Filipino changed or did not change, obeyed the parish priest or not, apparently regardless of the wishes or sermons of that priest. While prudence may suggest that one should avoid the priest if one disobeyed his mandates or suggestions, the image of the all-powerful friar dominating local life and all the people within the large municipal area we call a *pueblo* would seem at the least to need significant qualification.

### Filipino Mobility

We have a document from 1850 which illustrates concretely why the parish priest could not have known nor been able to control all aspects of everyone's life and behavior in a pueblo. While the text itself is overblown in its attempt to remove a new administrative burden from the parish priest's responsibility, the fundamental point of this Franciscan parish priest of Mahayhay, P. Fr. Victorino del Moral, is

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administrative hold of the Church appear, on the evidence of parish records, to have been much stronger" he concludes, consistent with what I am arguing more generally and for the entire 'Spanish period' that "we may well suspect that Tigaon is more typical of the Philippines as a whole than Nagcarlan is." Norman G. Owen, "Life, Death, and the Sacraments in a Nineteenth-Century Bikol Parish," in Daniel F. Doeppers and Peter Xenos, eds., *Population and History. The Demographic Origins of the Modern Philippines* (Madison: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1998), 243 and 244.

<sup>7</sup> This misconception of the role of the parish priest in Philippine history has in addition been accentuated by the maps used to show distribution of parishes by Regulars (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Recollects), Jesuits, or Seculars (diocesan priests). The usual practice in most maps is to signify parishes administered by each group. If, however, one situates those parishes on a map showing *all* settlements, whether parishes or not, visually one perceives the multiplicity of population centers and the relative paucity of parishes and priests in the Philippine countryside. See, for instance, Bruce Cruikshank, *Spanish Franciscans in the Colonial Philippines, 1578-1898: Catalogs and Analysis for a History of Filipinos in Franciscan Parishes* (Hastings, NE: Cornhusker Press, 2003, Volume One, 374ff., where I use the wonderful maps from the well-known and then authoritative 1900 publication *Atlas of the Philippine Islands* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), prepared from the careful and respected work of P. José Algue, S.J. For more on my Cornhusker Press publication, please see <http://spanishofphilippines.blogspot.com/>.

well taken:<sup>8</sup>

... With its visita of Nagonog this is a pueblo of 14,000 *almas*. It has sixty-one barrios scattered in every direction of the compass. Some of these barrios are one, two, three or more *leguas*<sup>9</sup> away ... Since this pueblo is coterminous with the two provinces of Tayabas and Batangas, between which cross the majority of the *indios* [here] visiting family members or being engaged in small daily commerce—and on a smaller scale this occurs as well with movement to other pueblos and provinces farther away, including the capital ... Thus it is that the *indio* who lives here today will tomorrow usually be living in the Camarines, in Manila, or in Bulacan (ff. 421v-22)

### Filipino Dispersion

While not all pueblos were as large or as dispersed as Mahayhay, and while mobility for economic gain may have increased in the last hundred years under the Spanish flag, nonetheless individuals living in different directions at varying distances from the población would have always been a problem. Duties within the población, in the church,<sup>10</sup> sickness and weather, all would have made regular visits and supervision outside the población difficult. The mobility of the Filipino combined with the dispersed residential pattern of an increasingly large population ineffectively under the “control” of a single parish priest directly and effectively undercuts the classic view. The priests themselves emphasized the need for regular supervision through daily contact, through proximity to his parishioners:<sup>11</sup>

The personal residence of the parish priest is a place of significant importance, and this I have seen carries with

<sup>8</sup> APSR, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Tomo 4, Doc. 29: Folleto del cura de Majayjay sobre cambio de los Apellidos, 1850, ff. 420-29.

<sup>9</sup> A *legua* was about 2.6 miles in distance, about an hour's walk.

<sup>10</sup> “... un Párroco que tiene 14 mil Almas a su cargo ... en Cuaresma tiene que administrar 9 mil confesiones, y esto sin contar otras cargas de que no puede prescindir un Párroco y que le ocupan indispensablemente lo más precioso del tiempo ... (APSR, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Tomo 4, Doc. 29: Folleto del cura de Majayjay sobre cambio de los Apellidos, 1850, f. 41v.

<sup>11</sup> Lorenzo Pérez, O.F.M., “Informe del P. Francisco Antonio Maceyra sobre varios puntos de los que convendría tratar en el Concilio provincial de Manila,” *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, 30 (1928), 391, quoting a 1771 *Informe*.

it a notable drawback. Bad things can occur at critical but unanticipated moments to the spiritual health of his flock if they live at a distance [from the rectory] ... and if a long period of time goes by [without seeing the parish priest].

A friar working as a parish priest might be effective, at least in the población, insofar as he resided in that población. I have seen in my own research on the Franciscans that frequently parishes had to share a priest in the decades around 1800 due to shortages of Franciscans from Spain.<sup>12</sup> It follows, logically, that when this occurred the priest's effectiveness in terms of access and local knowledge would have suffered. Conversely, increased residence length, at least when he was only assigned one parish, would have allowed the parish priest to build up local knowledge so as to more effectively monitor and influence family and pueblo political, social, and economic affairs.

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<sup>12</sup> "No se le oculta a VS que mi Provincia se halla en el día escasa de Religiosos para proveer a todos los Curatos que hasta la presente ha administrado; Siempre Señor se ha prestado gustosa a la Ereccion de nuevos Pueblos en Curatos por mui pequeños que hayan sido, aunque los religiosos curas hazgan tenido que vivir con suma economía para poderse mantener: Siempre mi Provincia ha reconocido las ventajas que han resultado de las nuevas fundaciones, y divisiones de Pueblos asi para el bien espiritual de los naturales como temporal: Pero ahora Señor por la inopia de religiosos en que se halla mi Provincia suplico a V.S. se digne acceder a que pueda encomendar interinariamente la administracion de algunos Pueblos pequeños de [150] a [200] tributos a los Curas de otros Pueblos poco maiores que están proximos a ellos, y que cómodamente pueden administrarlos, sin que por esto les falte el Pasto espiritual a sus ovejas, ni a los otros que nuevamente se idean unir; se ha suplido Señor esta falta en otras ocasiones encomendando la administracion de dichos Pueblos pequeños interinariamente a los Curas más inmediatos, y luego que ha habido inopia de Religiosos se han puesto los Curas correspondientes a los Curatos unidos, será muy poco Señor el defecto en estas uniones, pues los Pueblos que deben unirse los mas no llegan [200] tributos, y estan un quarto de legua, o poco más distancia de los otros Pueblos a quienes se piensan agregar. Sin embargo, mi Provincia procurará los Señores Diocesanos respectivos el numero de coadjutores necesarios en especial si la escasez de religiosos llegase a tanta, que sean precisas uniones de Pueblos de maior distancia para que en calidad de Coadjutor suplan interinariamente en dichos Pueblos...." *Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental*, Madrid [AFIO]

71/18, Manila, 11 November 1805. Concepcion, Fr. Pedro de la, O.F.M., Provincia. Instancia al Gobierno, suplicando que los Curatos pequeños se unan a los grandes por falta de personal que los administre, ff. 1-1v.

## Populous Parishes

Residence in the población itself is not the sole criterion to statistically glimpse the effectiveness of a parish priest. We also need to know the number of parishioners in a pueblo as well as how concentrated around the población their residences were. If there were one parish priest for, say, 500 families, perhaps he could see and chat with all or most of them regularly.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, the common experience was for Franciscan parishes to have more than 500 tributos:<sup>14</sup>

	<300 Tributos	300-399 Tributos	400-499 Tributos	500-599 Tributos	>600 Tributos
1649 N= 57	24 42%	16 28%	9 16%	2 4%	6 11%
1751 N=63	22 35%	10 16%	10 16%	6 10%	15 24%
1797 N=88	16 18%	7 8%	9 10%	4 5%	52 59%

<sup>13</sup> My use of 500 tributos is arbitrary, based on the Spanish administrative threshold for a priest to receive a full stipend. It may be 100 families too large: "Solórzano, discussing the size of the *doctrinas* in his *Política indiana*, gave a more pragmatic interpretation: 400 Indian households were assigned to each *doctrina* because that population would be sufficient to provide a living for a priest, while not exceeding the number that one priest could properly care for." Adriaan C. Van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism. A Parish History of Guatemala 1524-1821* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 61, citing Solórzano, *Política indiana*, Libro 4, Cap. 15, Párr. 54).

<sup>14</sup> Please see Appendix Three, Bruce Cruikshank, *Spanish Franciscans in the Colonial Philippines* for the sources used; I did not count each of the missions with populations less than 300 in 1797 and in 1751. The vagaries of the data are intrinsic and characteristic. The change in total from 1797 to the 1835 figures reflects, presumably the shortage of Franciscan personnel, since these data only refer to parishes with a resident Franciscan. The change in number and distribution from 1852 to the 1869 figures is probably due to a growth in number of municipalities, carved out of already existing *pueblos*. Indeed, as I said in my dissertation in 1975, "One advantage, perhaps the only one, of the Spanish use of *pueblos*, encompassing areas rather than just *poblaciones*, is that the creation of new *pueblos* from small units of older ones does not affect the total for that region" (Bruce Cruikshank, *A History of Samar Island, the Philippines, 1768-1898*, Ph.D. dissertation, History, University of Wisconsin, 1975, 274, with a similar observation appearing in the subsequent book (page 277). It does, of course, affect the totals of the older *pueblos*, making the continued frequency of those over (some well over) 500 tributos more striking.





If the Franciscan's health were good and población duties did not tie him down, he might travel regularly to the visitas, sitios, and rancherías officially part of the pueblo. Even in that case, though, he would not be in daily contact with all the families in his parish. We have a sense at least in one parish, studied intensively by Norman Owen, that some Franciscans were more active in getting away from the población than others.<sup>16</sup>

The example that Owen has documented, albeit from a mission, reminds us that as the parish priest grew older, or suffered from illness, loneliness and demoralization<sup>17</sup> or seemingly endless administrative duties, he might very well have been less active in getting away from the población for regular visits with his parishioners in the outlying parishes. As the population in and around the población grew he might be so busy that again it would have become difficult to visit dispersed families regularly.

From my earlier research on Samar's late eighteenth and nineteenth century history, I discovered that

Of thirty-eight pueblos listed about 1890, twenty-five had populations of 2,000 or more people living outside the población. Only twenty-three of these twenty-five had resident priests. These thirty-eight pueblos had an average of fifteen subordinate settlements—and Catarman had eighty-three and Gandara had sixty-four! While about fifty percent of all the population lived

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<sup>16</sup> Norman G. Owen, "Requiem for a Heroic Priest," in *Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Marcelino Foronda, Jr.*, edited by Emerita S. Quito (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1987). At one point Owen says in this outstanding essay that "Most of the friars who administered the mission—one of the smallest parishes in Camarines—were content to stay in the poblacion ..." (244-45).

<sup>17</sup> "... en tierras tan remotas, y estrañas, tiene tantos contrapesos, e incomodidades de destierro, melancolía, y soledad, pudiéndose aquí decir: Pueblo sin pueblo, y gente sin gente, porque verdaderamente no lo es para la sociabilidad europea, cortedad, y pobreza de la tierra, y sus naturales, destemplanza, e irregularidad de los climas; natural, y genio tan inconstante, y aun extravagante del indio; dependencias, y contiendas sin termino con Alcaldes Mayores, sus tenientes, encomenderos, cobradores, y demas Ministros de justicia, y por fin una continua fatiga y desvelo por defender al Indio del Español, del Chino, del Mestizo, del Mulato, y Negro, de Cuyo engaño y falacia, o tiranía es siempre el blanco este negro indio. Cargando le siempre el Ministro, y con el todo lo sobre dicho, interponiendo su vida, honra, credito, y aun su conciencia ..." AFIO 48/6, Fr. Francisco de Santa Ines, *Escrito de sobre la Visita de las Doctrinas que se intentó el año de 1707*. 1707, Ms., Es copia, f. 3.

within the población and thirteen percent lived within three miles, nonetheless fifteen percent were from three to six miles away with yet another eight percent of the population of these pueblos living over twelve miles from the población.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1860s a Bishop of Cebu, in discussing priestly visits to Capul (Samar again), said that "out of the twelve months of the year, they are completely abandoned in ten of them. While the parish priest comes two or three times a year, it is only for one or two weeks."<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, this pattern of residential dispersion does not seem to be exclusive to Samar, albeit perhaps more marked there than in other regions. Ecclesiastical authorities of the time were concerned with the spiritual or mentoring costs of having so few priests administering dispersed settlements in difficult terrain. In 1779, another Bishop of Cebu pointed out that the parish priests could not adequately attend to parishioners in a visita on an island separated by the sea from the población, since they saw them perhaps once a year.<sup>20</sup> My hunch is dispersion of population and lack of regular contact by a priest were patterns repeated throughout the Islands during the period the archipelago was governed by the Spanish.

Indices of dispersion and the size of pueblos then are two signifiers that should give us a sense of how difficult it would have been for a parish priest in good health and administering only one parish to attend adequately to the spiritual needs of his parishioners. Large populations away from the población, or multiple pueblos under his stewardship, would have significantly undercut the parish priest's ability to maintain the contacts and access to knowledge he would have needed in order to keep abreast of the politics, families, social conflicts and relationships, economics, and cultural practices in order to be a potentate or at least a significant player in the interactions around him.

## Avoidance of Church Sacraments

Even within the central portion of the pueblo, the población, Filipinos may have had more autonomy and control over their own

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce Cruikshank, *Samar: 1768-1898*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Archivo Histórico Nacional [AHN], Ultramar, Leg. 2203, exp. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Archivo General de las Indias, Spain [AGI], Filipinas, Leg. 1027.

priorities than the classic view suggests. How could one show this? One way is to look for situations where Filipinos did not do what the priest wanted in terms of core religious obligations. One provocative set of 1842 figures, drawn I assume from both Franciscan and Secular (diocesan) parishes, apparently tried to measure Filipino performance of their annual confession against the number obligated to do so.<sup>21</sup>

	Year 1842	Camarines Sur	Camarines Norte	Albay	Tayabas
Almas, Total		134256	21149	125060	84355
Did not take communion					
Males, #		28079	3122	19288	2877
Females, #		21101	2046	17361	2408
Total		49180	5168	36649	5285
% Total Pop.		36.6%	24.4%	29.3%	6.3%
Did not know <i>Doctrina</i>					
Males, #		4528	864	3299	1103
Females, #		4288	700	4083	1062
Total		8816	1564	7382	2165
% Non-Comm.		17.9%	30.3%	20.1%	41.0%
% Total Pop.		6.6%	7.4%	5.9%	2.6%

According to these figures, in the parishes of the Camarines, Albay, and Tayabas, out of a population of 364,820 confirmed young people and adults (my assumptions), 96,282 or 26.4%, did not take communion. We see here that about one out of every four individuals obligated by age and faith failed to make their annual confession, an obligation imposed by both king and their god, by both majesties. About twenty percent of those not taking communion apparently tried to do so but were disqualified due to ignorance of essential components of the *Doctrina Christiana* (19,927 out of 96,282), about five percent of the

<sup>21</sup> Philippine National Archives [PNA], Patronato, Unclassified—1836-1849, *Resumen de la Estadística remitida por los Curas Parrocos del Obispado de Nueva Caceres a la Secretaría Episcopal perteneciente al año 1842*. I omitted the figures from Nueva Ecija since they were partial only, but they can be seen in Appendix Four of my *Spanish Franciscans in the Colonial Philippines*. Data for absences from Mass for Camarines and Albay around 1781 can be found in Chapter Three of my *Spanish Franciscans in the Colonial Philippines*, v. 1, 159-63.

total population (infants presumably not included). The others were ill or absent or ..., a remarkable commentary on the inefficacy of priestly (both Franciscan and Secular) admonitions and alleged control.

This same source suggests that Church attempts to have parents marry each other before giving birth to their child were slightly more successful, at least for the 84% of those parents who had their child or children baptized:

	Year 1842	Camarines Sur	Camarines Norte	Albay	Tayabas	Totals
Total, Male Births		3082	443	2587	1406	7518
Total, Illegitimate Males		452	69	600	81	1202
%, Illegitimate Males		14.7%	15.6%	23.2%	5.8%	16.0%
Total, Female Births		2890	500	2460	1299	7149
Total, Illegitimate Females		416	96	559	83	1154
% Illegitimate Females		14.4%	19.2%	22.7%	6.4%	16.1%
Total, All Births		5972	943	5047	2705	14667
Total, Illegitimate Births		868	165	1159	164	2356
%, Illegitimate Births		14.5%	17.5%	23.0%	6.1%	16.1%

An overall average of 16.1% of children whose parents were known to the priest but remained unwed seems remarkable. Unfortunately we do not know if these figures are high or low at other times and in other regions, whether all the unwed couples lived away from the población, nor do we know how much confidence we can have in these numbers.<sup>22</sup> Provisionally, though, one may conclude that if the priests were so powerful and knowledgeable, how could parents have been in his ken and under his shadow but remained unmarried? Close attention to marriage and baptismal registers might indicate how many babies were born before nine months had elapsed since the wedding, suggesting whether priests' pronouncements against pre-marital sexual activity were effective.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics too can be misleading by suggesting a reliability and specificity that may be spurious—and the set used above may or may not be reliable (and the variations, especially with Tayabas, are troubling).

## Clerical Admonitions

Statistics will not tell us what priorities and values and passions led couples to apparently transgress the doctrine of their Church. Nonetheless, figures combined with multiple examples of clerical attacks against certain Filipino practices give us some sense of Filipino priorities and preferences. Clerics regularly denounced the persistence of Filipino refusal to congregate in and around the *población*, lamented the continuance of the practice of potential grooms serving in the homes of their future brides, denounced card playing and gambling, wrote about the persistence of drunkenness as well as religious practices and beliefs held to be non-Christian, and so forth. All of this should give one pause before using the classical view of the omnipotence of the parish priest in the rural Philippines before 1898. A system employing local potentates should not have been able to report continued failure after up to 333 years (in some cases) of activity as parish priests and missionaries. The very persistence of complaints paradoxically belies to a significant extent any claims that they were in charge in the *pueblos* and missions where they served as religious specialists. Conversely, it suggests that they were not as powerful as the classic view maintains.

Of course, it is part of the job description for a religious specialist to complain about his or her followers. We must recognize that priests by definition ask those under their direction to renounce and limit human appetites and behaviors. And in the world religions, particularly the Eastern Mediterranean ones of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the demands for ethical behavior and renunciations are such that the rabbis, priests or pastors, or *ulama* will frequently be seen as frustrated on the one hand and hectoring on the other. We should not mistake my analysis for the simple frustration of humans following their own appetites rather than behaving in accordance with the religious figure's strictures. I think Filipinos chose how to express selected values in their lives, even if the priest was opposed to those life practices. The priest was fundamentally marginal or at least not necessarily the definitive authority the literature has suggested.

## Filipino Disobedience

Filipinos did refuse to fully obey their priests. There are cases beyond simple human frailty, incidents where there is a particular issue and the parish priest loses to Filipinos. Let me offer an example

from the lowlands, albeit from the margins, from Samar. The classic view would suggest that if both the Franciscan as well as the Spanish *alcalde mayor* told Filipinos to quit stalling and construct a rectory for the parish priest, the rectory would have been built, promptly. Here we have a story, as usual given the nature of the documentary record with many aspects undeveloped, where Samareños—in the capital city of Samar itself—successfully resisted the entreaties of priest, provincial governor, and Bishop.<sup>23</sup> The situation is reported 20 September 1832 by the Bishop of Cebu as part of his inspection trip to the eastern Visayas in the early 1830s:

The pueblo of Catbalogan, the capital of the province of Samar, is one of those that lacks a rectory, though it does have an excellent house they call the Municipal Building, where no one lives. Although the parishioners of this pueblo excel among those of the other pueblos in the careful attention to the luxurious adornment of their private homes, they are obstinate and lazy when it comes to repairs for the church and rectory. ... They are not at all shamed that their parish priest not only lacks a rectory but is not even given a house in the [población] to live in. Rather he has to rent at the expense of the church a house in which to live, a thing which perhaps has not been duplicated any where else in these islands. They have arrived at such a point in their indolence (in order not to say arrogance) that they have completely mocked the admonishments of their bishop who entreated the *gobernadorcillo* and the group of *principales* when I visited that they help the parish priest build a rectory and repair the church. I made these entreaties in the presence of the *alcalde mayor*, I spoke of the obligations they had as children of the church and faithful subjects of the king to maintain the house of God and to give to their priest [a residence] appropriate to his character and office.<sup>24</sup> They promised me that they would do this, but they

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<sup>23</sup> PNA. Patronato. Unclassified—1831-1834. 1832: Expediente creado a Consulta del Señor Obispo de Zebú, dando parte del estado deplorable en que se hallan las Yglesias y Casas Parroquiales de algunos Pueblos de las Provincias de Leyte, Samar, y Caraga. 10ff. and title page, with folio numbers written in pencil on the pages.

<sup>24</sup> According to the Franciscan assignment lists, P. Fr. Gregorio Chacon had been parish priest from 1825 to some time in 1828 but there was no parish priest assigned from 1829 to 1832. In 1832, P. Fr. Pascual Gómez was appointed. He was then twenty-six years old and this was his first parish. He was replaced in 1834 by P. Fr. Timoteo Calderon, twenty-four years old and again taking a parish for the first time. It seems odd to me, perhaps reflecting tension between Franciscans and the parishioners in

had not the least intention to do so ... since [nothing has been done] in spite of the efforts of the *alcalde mayor* and the parish priest. The priest ... did manage to get their help in repairing a sad house of an *Indio* amidst the houses of the [población] where he could live until (they said) the rectory was built. Not a hand has been lifted since toward that work ....

I have been assured that the people in Catbalogan have always maintained that they owe no obedience to their priests in aiding them to repair the church and rectory ... This bad example by the parishioners of Catbalogan will have an effect on other pueblos so that perhaps in a few years there will be only ruined remnants of the churches and rectories in [the rest of Samar].

The report eventually ended up on the desk of the Governor General of the Philippines, the energetic and efficient Don Pascual Enrile y Alcedo, who on 20 November 1832 endorsed a plan to ensure that the parishioners in Catbalogan build a rectory. While we do not know if even his decision took effect, this is still a noteworthy case suggesting that the ruling group of Filipinos in Catbalogan could delay and defer when projects for the church and parish priest did not meet their priorities. Contrary to the classic view of the central and seemingly all-powerful foreign cleric in the pueblos, the priests here seemed to have been effectively marginalized.

Now let's look at a case from the highlands. The well known Franciscan P. Fr. Vicente Inglés in his informative 1720 report on the Baler coastal and inland missions<sup>25</sup> introduces us to a case study that initially seems humorous but fundamentally leads us to see the fundamental marginality of a priest or missionary. Father Vicente tells the story of how he had heard from "some *Aetas* that they had heard that some remontados and apostates wanted to kill me. I was then making my inspection trip to the pueblo of Casiguran [and was told] that ... if I went into the mountains I would be assassinated. With this information in mind, but knowing that except for a few bad people the Franciscans were well recognized for their love-filled and careful work among the [highlanders], I [continued] on to Dicalaya ..." Nothing happened and

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Catbalogan, that such junior priests would have been assigned to the province's capital city's parish or that there would be gaps in such assignments.

<sup>25</sup> Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Ms. 11,014, ff. 614-23: Vincente Inglés, O.F.M., *Informe sobre el progreso de la conversión de los indios de la isla de Tarabas* [sic]. Manila, 6 July 1720. Ms., [11] ff.

he arrived safely, and there he learned that in the riverbed of the river Garrongot,

five days of navigation away, among the other lost *Indios* there there was a native of the pueblo of Dibimbinan with them. This individual twelve years earlier had absented himself [from Dibimbinan], taking with him a married woman whose husband was still alive. Moved by compassion and pity for their souls, I sought to find ways and means to bring them back. It appeared to me that the easiest and most suitable way to achieve this would be to speak to some of the *Indios*, particularly the parents and brothers of the man so that they would seek him out and tell him that he had nothing to fear from the priest. I would receive him with love and care and only wanted that he recognize his sin so that he could reform himself. These reasons led the parents of the young man to go out to seek him themselves, and in short order they returned with him along with the woman he had made off with. When I heard they were already in the pueblo, I ordered them brought to me. I received them graciously and with great tenderness, made them reflect on their offence and the heinous nature of their transgression. I told them ... that all I requested was that they repent and beg God's forgiveness and I would then be willing to give them both Confession. The woman agreed to this and since she had forgotten the Doctrina Christiana and the prayers, I sent her with an *Indio* to her parents so that she could learn them again.

Subsequently this woman who had run off from her husband with another man, and who apparently had been living in adultery for over a decade, was received back by her legal husband and they lived together "cheerfully" "in a married and happy life."

However, the fellow who had absconded with her (whose name was Francisco), who had returned to the pueblo with the married woman and met with the priest, this Lothario not only subsequently went back to the mountains. When he left he had yet *another* woman with him. The priest sent the father of the man after them, and along the trail they encountered some *remontados* who, when asked if they knew where the couple had gone, replied that the pursuers should not go farther. Francisco had left some armed men behind to kill those pursuing him and the woman. Moreover, if the priest were to go after them, he or the *remontados* or Aetas would kill him. The party pursuing



Francisco gave up, returned to the pueblo and told the priest. The priest said that he mourned "the irretrievable loss of their souls," while acknowledging that he had become an object of ridicule to the peoples of the *contracosta*. "This is the general corruption of all of this area, but particularly for those who live in the rivers [and mountains]. The missionaries take clothing and other trifles in order to attract them, and when the missionaries come they are greeted with great shouts. Now we are left as figures of fun without those miserables knowing that they are left with the worst part, that they have lost the most." He concluded his report by observing that "Christian customs are not preserved among the *Indios*," and that all that is left are the words of the gospels and "the infinite pity of God."

Yes, a classic tale of human appetite re-emerging and triumphant in spite of the best efforts of the priest. This is a tale that many devotees of world religions would find familiar. It is unfortunate that we do not know certain other facts—how old were the Lothario and lovers, were there children of the first woman, either with her husband or with the man who took her into the hills for ten years? What was said between that woman and her legal and religiously sanctioned husband when they were reunited? Was she in fact kidnapped initially or did she go willingly? Did her husband have mistresses while she was in the hills? Did the *second* woman go willingly or was she kidnapped?

Beyond rueful amusement of our common human condition and frustration at the details of the story we do not know, there is another dimension that suggests how marginal the priest or missionary could be. Francisco apparently had allies and defenders, both in the pueblo and in the hills. He was apparently able to make plans, without betrayal, mobilize armed allies to protect his flight, and communicate fully with "cimarrones" met on the trail while avoiding recapture or confrontation with the priest. The priest had been kept in the dark about the plans, the allies, the victim or willing new sexual partner, and only found out about it after the fact. In spite of his best efforts, this experienced missionary priest could do nothing.

## Conclusion

As scholars do more and more careful study of the political dynamics<sup>26</sup> of more mainstream pueblos generally and the poblaciones specifically, I imagine that even more cases of Spanish priests not having their way will emerge,<sup>27</sup> perhaps helping to confirm in whole or in part this radical new vision of the parish priest during the Spanish colonial era. It would be particularly useful to find cases where the priest backed one side or one party in a pueblo's election only to lose when the votes were counted.

Yes, many of the historical records indicate that Filipinos in areas under Spanish imperial rule were full of faith, fervent in their understanding and practice of the Roman Catholic faith brought to them by missionary priests. We must be cautious, though, in asserting that these faithful Filipinos were dominated by parish priests. I suggest that the classic view of the priest probably overstates the power, authority, knowledge, and ubiquity of the parish and mission priests during the Spanish colonial era. □

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Glenn A. May, "Civic Ritual and Political Reality: Municipal Elections in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Ruby R. Paredes, ed., *Philippine Colonial Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies (Monograph Series, no. 32), 1988), 13-40.

<sup>27</sup> Other Samar cases of limits on a priest's power can be found in my *Samar: 1768-1898*, namely on pages 65-6, 152, 154-57, and (where the Franciscans won) 169-84. I found a reference to another, outside of Samar, but the material is sufficiently incomplete and the lesson learned may be similar enough to the curbs on priestly power in the Catbalogan case that I merely give the reference for others who may wish to pursue the conflict. This case—albeit with powerful Spanish allies for the Filipino opponents of the Franciscan side—is from the Philippine National Archives [PNA, *Erección de Pueblos*, Albay, 1800-1858, Exp. 3, ff. 62-97: 1814] and is entitled Expediente creado a representacion del Cura de Cagsawa sobre los perjuicios que resultan de establecer este en la visita de Daraga; y pide se traslade al sitio de Putiao, por hallarse en la hermosa situacion. P. Fr. Francisco de Aragonese o de la Concepcion, O.F.M., with general Franciscan support, favored Putiao while principales of Daraga and the Alcalde mayor favored Daraga. The Treasury Department opted for Daraga. The Franciscan side lost.