

Book Review

AMID DISCORDANT SOUNDS

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Muslim Filipino: Heritage & Horizon

By Peter Gordon Gowing

Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979. 332 pp.

In the context of present efforts to forge a viable national consciousness, none offers a more perplexing obstacle than the so-called "Moro Problem" in southern Philippines. Dr. Gowing believes that the existence of such a problem is a product of historical circumstances that created false images and long standing hatreds between Muslim and Christian Filipinos. Lack of adequate information and exposure on their differing perspectives has indeed proven tragic to Muslim-Christian relations.

The book may be divided into two parts: the first deals with a reconnaissance of Moro culture; the second, an analysis of Moro political history. Chapter I talks about the homeland of the Moros, picturesquely described as a crab (the island of Mindanao) extending an irritated claw (the Zamboanga Peninsula) after a school of minnows (the Sulu Archipelago). The description is somewhat apocalyptic: the claw has been irritated for quite a time and will continue to irritate a national government and a majority population whose understanding and knowledge of the Moros are at best superficial.

Muslim history is indeed a thrilling story, as Dr. Gowing puts it, and important insofar as the Moro sense thereof conditions his relationship with other Filipinos. Islam which was introduced via the Malay world remains a significant element in the cultural chemistry of Muslims. Muslims are not totally different from Christian Filipinos, yet

they are still different. Their orientation towards the Malay and Arab worlds gives them a separate religio-cultural identity. This and the fact that Christian Filipinos are oriented towards the occident essentially amount to "an encounter of cultures."

The postwar resurgence of Islam and the deepening Islam consciousness further widened the gulf that separates the two cultural communities. The creation of the Republic only deepened the alienation that the Muslims felt. Mindanao became the scene of the hostilities that erupted from such tragic alienation. In fact the volatile situation reached crisis proportions shortly before and after the declaration of Martial Law. Martial Law brought the MNLF which later became part of the Bangsa Moro Army. It must be borne in mind though, that Muslim-Christian hostility in the archipelago is four centuries old and the latest outbreak in Mindanao is but another chapter thereof. The Muslims have always resisted what they perceived as colonizing endeavors started by the Spanish invaders, continued by the Americans and now by Christian Filipinos.

It is all too true that misunderstanding between the two communities springs from the fact that their respective positions are explained to each other quite incorrectly and inadequately. Too often, educated and urban Christian Filipinos accuse Muslims of couching everything in religious terms. The fact is, as Dr. Gowing points out, the Muslim Filipinos have always belonged to the age of Faith where all politics are perceived as religion. In contrast, Christian Filipinos belong to the age of Politics where all religion are seen as politics. While the Philippine Christian society is secularizing with religion necessarily playing a secondary role, the Muslim Filipinos cannot understand such indifferent secularism.

Eager efforts to integrate the Moros have only been minimally successful. The integrated ones include the educated and affluent families and the politicians who are "beneficiaries" of the national system. The rest of the Muslim Community still see themselves outside the national body politic. If they resist the integrative efforts, it is because they see such efforts as assimilative and therefore annihilative of their identity. The lingering suspicion and mistrust that the majority Christian population is out to destroy their religious ideals is enough to render all at-

tempts at conciliation insignificant.

How then to incorporate the Muslims? Secession is futile for three reasons: a) the boundaries of a politically and economically viable Moroland are difficult to delineate; b) there is lack of international support for secession; and c) the Philippine Republic refuses to even countenance the idea. Altering the present unitary structure of the republic will at best remain only a possibility for it entails a revision of the concept "one nation, one race, one culture." In the force of the zealous promotion of "Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa" by the present national government, there are unlikely to be further steps in that direction. There are constitutional guarantees which cannot be fully explored until Martial Law shall have been lifted and the country is back to normalcy.

The situation is not hopeless, the outlook not bleak, though hostilities may continue, if both Muslim and Christian Filipinos develop a disposition for compatibility. Easier said than done. But disposition, according to Dr. Gowing, is a matter of will, of attitude, of inclination, and these are shaped by experience, emotion, information and inculcated values. "There can be a new disposition for compatibility if there is a determination for it."

Basic to the above is an appreciation on the part of Christian Filipinos of the long-standing and deep-seated fears of Muslims regarding Christian Filipino motivations—an appreciation that such fears are real and deserve immediate consideration and action. Such positive action would involve, among others, promoting wholesome attitudes in Muslim-Christian relations by utilizing the resources of public and private schools and the communication media. For the Muslims the task is as gigantic: the need to accept a "given" notion that they are citizens of the Republic and that they need to reconcile their national and religious loyalties.

In his experience as prime mover of Muslim-Christian interaction, Dr. Gowing has discovered that the situation has much room for improvement, that the present state of Muslim-Christian relationship have chances for conciliation and accomodation. Perhaps, the best agents of change, would be the youth who in many a nation's history have proven to be a powerful moral force. The Muslim and Christian Filipino youth must realize, for their sake and for that of the upcoming genera-

tions, the tragedy of having to fight and destroy themselves unnecessarily. Only then can peace come to Moroland.

This well-documented and fairly accurate survey of Moro history and contemporary political situation is a gem to students of Philippine history, who only read a paragraph or two about the Muslims in the Philippine history books. Indeed, Dr. Gowing does the Filipino people a service by putting out a scholarly book on the subject with the wealth of material at his disposal. His approach to the Moro problem which is a basically Christian problem also, is clearly humane, quite typical of one who serves as an educational missionary. Dr. Gowing indeed strikes a sympathetic and optimistic note amid the discordant sounds.