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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1916 AT ORLANDO.

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The writer does not know whether or not Florida had such a charm for others as it did for him. It was his first visit into the land of fruits and flowers. Everything was full of novelty and interest from the time the train left Jacksonville, the gateway, till we reached Orlando, the beautiful, set down in the midst of its lakes and orange groves and long stretching arches of moss-covered trees.

The lure of the land must have been on the Commissioners, for we were given to understand that this was the largest Assembly, in point of numbers, for many years, if not indeed in the history of our Assemblies. And while the Assembly, impatient of long speeches and prolonged discussions, concluded its business with its record breaking speed, set some two or three years ago as a seven day assembly, yet many of the Commissioners were loathe to leave and tarried over in different portions of the State.

As to the hospitality of the people of Orlando; all that the late lamented pastor, Dr. Staggs, had promised in his most felicitous invitation was fully carried out. The only feature of regret being that he was not with us with his genial humor.

The Composition of the Assembly.

In its make-up it seemed to the writer, who has attended five or six Assemblies as a Commissioner, and several others as a

SOME ASPECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.

BY ROBERT E. SPEER.

As we went to and fro on a recent visit in the Philippine Islands and talked with individuals or with groups of individuals, two questions were sure sooner or later to be discussed: (1) What were the religious conditions in the islands which justified the coming of the evangelical churches, and what are the conditions which warrant their continuance to-day, and (2) what are the religious conditions in the evangelical churches themselves? Are these churches competent or qualified to do or to share in doing the work that needs to be done? Those who read this article will wish, first of all, to have without comment, the answers which the Filipinos themselves gave to these questions, to be followed by any interpretation or comment which we may have to add.

The first group to which these questions were put was made up of representative men and women from the evangelical churches in the Island of Panay. One laymen spoke up at once, "I see no need," said he, "for any other warrant for the presence of the evangelical churches than is supplied by the great commission. That commission holds with regard to our people as truly as for any others who are without the gospel of the New Testament. I used to think, indeed, that I was a Christian, but when I read the gospels I realized what I had never realized before, namely, that I was a sinner and that I needed to be saved and that only the grace of God could save me. The Filipino people need to realize this to-day, and they will realize it only through contact with the New Testament gospel and without the evangelical church that contact will not be given to them." The ablest minister who was present followed him. "There are many places in these islands," said he, "in the mountains and in the barrios where the people are not Christians and do not profess to be. But even in the cities, where the whole population is nominally Christian, it is only

nominally so. I was representative of the frame of mind of the normal Filipino and I regarded myself as a Christian. But when I read the Bible, I realized how far short I came from being anything of the kind. The great difficulty of our work here and the supreme evidence of religious need is the failure of the Filipino people to conceive the New Testament type of religious faith and experience. When they first hear of evangelical Christianity they think of it in terms of the same sort of religious unreality to which they have been accustomed. And I wish that this were all that needed to be said, but I have to say also that that religious unreality tolerated flagrant sin, if only it was careful in its external conformity." The next speaker was an interesting character, a harnessmaker, who often went on itinerating trips with Mr. Doltz, but who insisted on defraying all his own expenses and who scorned the idea of being paid for any evangelistic service, but on the other hand, with his brother contributed toward the support of an evangelist. "Christ," said he, "came not among the Gentiles, but among the Jews, and it was to the Jews that he sent his disciples first, yet the Jews had the Scriptures, although they did not understand them, and theoretically they knew more about God than any other people. So to me," he went on, "it is a wonderful thing, but exactly right, that the American Christians should have sent the gospel here where God was known yet not known. The Filipinos were like the Athenians, they did not know the God they were worshipping. I say what I know when I declare that Paul's words were exactly true of us, that we knew God and worshipped Him not as God." "I can only say," added a fourth speaker, "that formerly there were many Christians here in Panay who were murderers and thieves and who did not consider themselves any the less Christians on that account. Now it is much more generally known what true Christianity is, but we need still more sharpening of the moral sense. Conscience is still weak among us and needs to be nourished into a larger vigor." "One profound need among us," said another, "has been a religious fellowship founded in love. Something of this kind has been growing up

through the evangelical church, but we need nothing more than the religious influence which will foster such an ideal. The moral needs of our people and the moral gains which have been brought to them by evangelical missions are the warrant you are asking about." "Any nation that is without the Bible," said another, "has a right to ask for it and to expect that the nations which possesses it will bring it." Two women spoke next. "It is true," said one, "that practically all the Filipino people wish to be regarded as Christians, but by Christ's law that by their fruits ye shall know them, they are not Christians, and the gospel should be preached to them just as to other people and as to the whole world." "Perhaps our people were taught much truth," said the other woman, a fearless worker, who often herself conducts preaching services in the streets, "but they were not given the power to fulfil it." "Even if we were Christians," declared another, "was that any reason why the Christians of other countries should not come to help us? Did not the apostles in Jerusalem send a deputation to visit the Christians at Antioch? Do we not need and have we not a right to all that we can gain from other Christians anywhere?" "What the missionaries have brought," said another, before we passed to another subject of conversation, "is warrant enough for their bringing it. We need nothing more than such pure and true ideals of life as we have seen in them."

A second group to which the same questions were put represented the Provinces of Sorsogon and Albay at the southern end of the Island of Luzon. The emphasis here was laid on the present religious conditions and the inquiry as to whether the Roman Church was not meeting, or could not meet these. "In Sorsogon," said the first speaker, "the conditions to-day are just as they have been in previous times. The people continue undisturbed in their old religious ideas. They still believe in pilgrimages and there is no less fanaticism or superstition than there used to be in trusting saints and worshipping at miraculous shrines. The grip of the Church is as strong and as weak as ever. Its leaders preach to-day, as before, unquestioning devotion to authority and they use the hard times consequent

upon drought and three successive failures of our crops as an occasion for getting masses said and atonement made for past religious negligence." "I think quite differently," said a second speaker from Sorsogon, "our people are far more liberal and tolerant than they used to be and come quite readily now to the evangelical church and the best people among us have swung completely away from the old Church and are interested to know what it is that evangelical Christianity has to say to their minds and hearts." "The old Church," said the ablest man in the group, "simply did not meet human need and it paralyzed the minds of the young men. When I was a boy the schools were conducted by the Church and their teachings were utterly unsatisfying. It was mere routinism and the inculcation of formal obedience to church authority. There was nothing living and real. There was no answer to the questions which arose in young men's minds except the answer of repression. The result was inevitable. As soon as political authority was broken, the attendance at mass fell away and now a small fraction of the population attends. Where the patron saint of a village is supposed to have miraculous power, the attendance on the annual fiesta day is great as at Tievi, where Our Lady of Salvation is supposed to work miracles. But elsewhere the fiesta is just a social holiday and not a religious ceremony at all. The moral conditions of the people and the priesthood are no better than in the old days of which Rizal wrote in 'The Social Cancer,' and away from the immediate seats of the bishops the immorality of the priests is no more hidden now than formerly. The bishop did remove one priest down here when it was proved in court that he had a wife and twelve children. But the priest refused to leave and said that if the bishop insisted he would take off his habit and stand as a candidate for the Assembly, so the bishop yielded and let him stay. The civil marriage law has helped the moral conditions but the priests fight it and teach openly that it is not valid and that people civilly married may be married to someone else by the Church." This conference broke out at this point into a series of tales about priests and it seemed better

to drop the subject and to ask instead what the greatest defects and needs of our Protestant churches were.

These two conferences were typical. It will suffice to add to them one representative individual opinion. He was a clever old man who was a member of the town council in a most picturesque municipio in Tayabas. He had been, he said, a member of the Roman Church, "a third degree member with a big badge on his heart," as he expressed it. But he could not find anything that would satisfy his mind or inward spirit. He stood and stretched his arms in prayer before the saints but he got no nourishment to his soul. In his eager search for truth that would content him, he left the old Church and joined the Aglipayanos, but found nothing there. Then he heard Mr. Snook, the first evangelical missionary in the Tayabas province, preaching but it was commonly said among the people that his message was anti-Christian and demoniac. The old man was timid and stood afar off. But as time went on he drew nearer and at last peeped in the windows where Mr. Snook was preaching and one day heard what he described as "an Holy Spirit Call" and "was convinced." After that he lost all fear, came clear in across the threshold, and now was satisfied. No more with outstretched arms before the saint on occasional days, but every night upon his knees within his own house he prayed, and God was near to him and the best of all realities. The first chapter of John was the richest of all written words to him and life held for him now only eagerness and joy. The glow of a sincere and actual experience was in the old man's account. And there are thousands like him who, if the right of evangelical Christianity to be in the Philippine Islands is to be tried and judged, are ready to appear as witnesses. Are not such simple statements as these right and of life, sufficient answers to the question whether the presence of our evangelical missionaries in the Philippine Islands is justified? These simple temperate testimonies show that there was something which these hungry souls did not have and could not get, something to which they had a right as the Father's children for whom the Son of God died. With the coming of men and

women who gave them the Bible to read for themselves and told them simply of the love of God in Christ and the life and light which are as free to every man in Him as the blue skies over these islands or the blue waters around their shores, a new day began for these people. What more needs to be said? Must the dawn justify itself and life make apologies because it is? With no abuse, and abstaining from all harsh and sweeping indictment, it is enough to say that there was spiritual and moral need in the Philippine Islands which justified the coming of any men and women of pure and loving hearts. That spiritual and moral need is here still and not only are the missionaries who have come to deal with it justified in their presence but from every island in the Philippines Christ calls for more men and women like them of whatsoever church they may be to let his light shine and his life work here where the need is real and where no ecclesiastical monopoly has any right to keep Christ's sheep hungry and in the dark.

If anyone doubts the need or warrant for every spiritual service which can be rendered to the Philippine peoples, he needs only to come and see the conditions for himself, to mingle with the people, to realize the religious lapse and destitution, to mark the multitudes who do not need to be enticed from one fold to another but who are as sheep without a shepherd, having no fold at all. The work of the American Episcopal Church in the Philippines was begun with no reference to the nominally Christian people of the Islands. It held itself as limited strictly to the non-Christian tribes and to such American people as were open to its ministry. But its missionaries would have been no true ministers of Christ, if once drawn to the Philippine Islands by these calls, they had here been deaf to the other voices appealing from every side, voices of irreligion, of unbelief, of moral need, of intellectual hunger, of physical suffering, of helpless groping on the part of young men and young women, with their old anchorage gone and beaten by heavy storms. Could Christian men stand mute and inactive before such need? Not if they were to continue to be Christian men. The Episcopal missionaries did, accordingly, having discovered the real

conditions, just what the other American missionaries came to do having known them in advance. Next to the hospital which has done and is doing a Christ-like service, a beautiful church has now been built with a deacon from a mission of the Episcopal Church in another Latin land and a membership is growing up of the same kind of young men and women as have been gathered and are being gathered all through the Islands, into the churches of the other American missions. It is not intrusion for any American church to be doing this work in the Philippine Islands or in any other land.

Bishop Brent has stated the matter in his own strong way in a statement which he was kind enough to give me on "Catholicity and Intrusion."

Speaking of papalism as "Half-Rome" and an exclusive anti-papalism as the "Other-Half-Rome," he goes on, "There is also a 'Tertium Quid.' There are those group-Christians which cheerfully accord all other group-Christians, on the right hand and on the left, a place in the sun. They abstain from universal indictments. Recognizing that no one fragment, however bulky, of a shattered Christendom possesses a monopoly either of truth or of righteousness, Tertium Quid finds itself incompetent to dictate terms to, or to pose as the reformer of, the morals of any other group of Christians but itself. With clear-cut convictions of its own, it is not hasty to enter the entanglement of formal treaties or ententes. Respect for the position of others is not allowed to dictate terms injurious to self-respect. Self-respect, on the other hand, is not allowed to disregard the courtesies and services due to others. The ideal is such unity of spirit as will express itself in fellowship and conference with other group-Christians, who are striving to reach a fuller conception of God's will. Tertium Quid is for the moment shy of crystallizing the results of conference into legislation because certain group-Christians are too—let us say, shy, ever to confer with other group-Christians. Partial conference whether at Trent or Hampton Court or Edinburgh, can reach only tentative conclusions. It were presumptuous and perilous to pretend otherwise. Tertium Quid, therefore, ought

not merely to confer but should also try, in the absence of those who are still too shy to confer, to do justice to the contentions of the absentees. They will receive no decoration for so doing, but it is an inspiring obligation at close quarters, however forbidding its countenance viewed from afar.

"When it comes to the extension of the organized operations of *Tertium Quid* the situation takes on a delicate complexion. Like all other group-Christians it claims world-wide commission. The unevangelized in any country call for consideration and possibly for action. There is no serious difficulty here. The only real problem is what should be done in relation to Latin Christian countries which, with one voice or another, attract attention or cry for succor. Part of the problem has already solved itself. Any group-Christians who believe themselves to possess national character must follow the flag in order to minister to their fellow nationals. Near Louisiana and the far Philippines require the same treatment from *Tertium Quid*. We go there partly because each is American territory and partly because the Church of the country does not feel justified in ministering to our people as Christians. Once there, the relationship to 'Half-Rome' and the 'Other Half-Rome' is just what it is at home. There is the same duty to lapsed Christians from the fragment of the church that dominates, that there is in Maryland or New York—that and no more.

"Our church has, as is recorded in the pages of this volume, by her action, also taken the position of *Tertium Quid* in Mexico whence, years since, a cry for succor issued. The appeal of distressed conditions of faith and morals took individual missionaries to Brazil, and later our church endorsed their action by organizing there. Contiguity, increasing American immigration and a growing body of unchurched Christians carried us to Cuba.

"Hence we are irrevocably committed to intrusion by our definite action. We are neither in a position to reform the Christianity of the countries concerned nor could we handle the situation if the Latin Church withdrew and we had the field to ourselves. Repudiation of our past course is inconceivable.

The sole question is in what spirit we shall continue. The answer undoubtedly is we must continue in a Catholic temper.

* * * When it comes to a Latin country, the Catholic temper should rise in inverse ratio to the monopolistic spirit when it frowns on us as intruders. It is one of the freest, though by no means the happiest, experiences of the Christian life to keep a friendly spirit and maintain a level justice in the face of repudiation, hostility and hatred."

The presence of missionaries in the Philippine Islands to re-enforce whatever spiritual energies are at work and to do work which will otherwise not be done is not an intrusion upon any one's preserve nor an invasion of a field which any one else can claim. It is as clear an obedience to duty and the call of God as could be found. And yet it would not be fair or true to fail to recognize the work that has been done in the Islands. "There," as Bishop Brent says, "whatever superstitions and vices there have been and are, the Roman Catholic church with the weapon of the cross has saved the millions who inhabit the archipelago from the same sure fate from which Charles Martel with the hammer of war saved Gaul, from the unconquered, if not the unconquerable curse of Mohammedanism." The Roman Catholic church has done a great work of general religious instruction and enlightenment. Intellectual foundations have been laid which one does not find anywhere else in eastern Asia. The whole thought and spirit of mind is different from what one meets in Siam. There the thought of God is insecure, dubious, half denied. Here the theistic faith is clear. There Buddhist ideas of fate and rebirth have blunted the sense of personality and stunted the growth of those notions of responsibility and duty which are the essential stuff of character. Here the Christian forms of thought have been inbred and though the hold of the church is gone and men have wandered far away, they carry with them the remembrance that once they were baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. It is very different in the Philippines also from South America. Reasoned rationalism, Comtism, naturalistic agnosticism, have not made the ravages in the Philippines that they

have in South America. Many new and respectful thoughts came to me one night in Iloilo as I heard Mr. Doltz at the close of an evangelistic meeting for students remind them that they had all been baptized into Christ's name, that the appeal he was making to them was an appeal to a familiar loyalty. He did not need to ask them to believe. With most of them the belief was already there. He needed to call them to the reality of moral obedience and in the hush of the quiet tropical night one after another signed his name to the statement that was to transmute a receding memory into a reality of character, "I promise God to study the words of Jesus Christ and with His help to make them the principles of my life." Would that those men in the Roman church who believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God and who have made His words the principles of their lives might come to dominate that great organization and more of them take their part in making the church what it ought to be in these Islands.