

Redeeming Our Nation's History

There is a well-known Filipino saying: “*Ang hindi lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan.*” He who does not look back at where he came from will not arrive at where he intends to go.

To put it in another way, our progress as a people lies in our being a people of history.

But we have a dilemma: The specter of our colonial past dominates our historical horizon. It has penetrated deep into our national psyche, changing our very cultural makeup. We have long been taught to abhor and discard this chapter of our past. But clearly, if we are to be a people of history, it must include *this* story.

In fact, redeeming it — turning it to our advantage — may be one of the things we urgently need to chart a way forward.

Consider this. The Philippines was named after a most evangelistic European king – Philip II of Spain. The name “Philip” comes not from a great Apostle but from a servant—one who waited on the tables to care for the children and women. Philip of Scripture was, in other words a domestic, but he was instrumental in teaching the Gospel to a high official of the Ethiopian kingdom. Tradition says that it was this Phillip that opened that kingdom to Christianity.

Is it an accident that that the Philippines became the most evangelized nation in the least evangelized area in the world? The answer is "No" for the Christian, who knows that all things are turned to good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. At the height of Western colonial expansion, the Philippines fell into the hands of the Spaniards and the Americans, rather than to the Portuguese, Dutch, French or British, who, overall, did not bring the Christian faith to the natives whom they colonized. Had the Spaniards abandoned the Philippines, it might have instead been dominated by the religions of our neighbors — Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism or even atheism. As it was, in spite of the abuses, the strife, and the oppression, there were also good men and the Word of God. And the Gospel of Jesus Christ found a foothold in Asia.

Today, with the era of Western-driven evangelism in its twilight, a new people have emerged as a promising missionary force. These are none other than Filipinos, who have been uniquely qualified by geography and their historical experience to bring the Gospel to the nations.

All over the world it is known that the Filipino cultural makeup is unparalleled in its adaptability to other cultures. As a nation, we were never invaders or colonizers. We have no history of aggression towards other nations, no warlike intentions towards others. Our long history of natural calamities, corrupt governments, failed economies, lack of opportunities and injustice have produced in us an extraordinary patience, resiliency and perseverance. We have developed the rare endurance necessary for bearing God's message of hope to the areas of the world most difficult to reach.

So what shall we do with our colonial past? We should do better than discard it: We should redeem it — buy back what was lost, compensate for its faults, turn it to our advantage as a people. If God so wills, even the most sullied history can be redeemed or improved.

The question is not whether or not there is something of value or noble vision in our past; the real question is whether or not we are willing to regard our history as people who believe in a God whose good purposes can never be stymied by the worst calamity. Christ triumphed by the cross. If we are indeed a nation of Christians, so can we.

This editorial is adapted from Dr. Sonia Zaide's presentation entitled “Becoming a People of History during ISACC's ISIP-ISAK Forum on May 28, 2011. Dr. Zaide is a Fellow of ISACC.