

Merchants and Missionaries: A Theologian's View of Clerical Involvement in the Galleon Trade

NICHOLAS P. CUSHNER, S. J.*

THE PRIVILEGE of Royal Patronage in America brought under the jurisdiction of the kings of Spain all church functionaries from archbishops to altar boys. In return for this effective control, granted in 1508, the Spanish Crown agreed to pay the expenses involved in the evangelization of the New World. Both in theory and in practice the agreement was fraught with problems, and not the least of these was the irregularity of the royal paymasters. There always seemed to be enough coin in the coffers to send priests to America and the Philippines, but once the missionaries arrived at their destinations, royal beneficence became less evident. The great number of missionaries' letters preserved in the Archive of the Indies asking the Crown for wine, oil, salaries, and *limosnas*, bears eloquent testimony to the truth of this. (Anyone reading these letters today, however, must remember that *limosna* was an elastic term which might be stretched from enough money to meet actual need to that required to provide wealth and luxury.)

The missionaries had many ways of augmenting their finances. In America the religious orders acquired estates at a fraction of the price demanded from the regular colonists. Yerba cultivation in the Jesuit reductions is well known, and almost 90% of its profits were used within the reductions themselves.¹ The missions of Asia, however, responded differently to the same situation. In Japan and China, Portuguese and Spanish missionaries had no estates, and those owned in the tropical Philippines yielded little financial return until sugar cultivation expanded rapidly in the eighteenth century. The Crown often supported hospitals and colleges in this latter mission by assigning a number of native tributes to a specific work. After

* The author is a candidate for the doctorate in history at University College, London.

¹ Magnus Mörner, *The Political and Economic Activities of the Jesuits in the La Plata Region: The Hapsburg Era* (Stockholm, 1953), 204.

the union of the crowns of Portugal and Spain, the Jesuits in Japan largely financed their mission by trading in silk. By agreement with the merchants of Macao they were allowed to ship fifty *piculs* of raw silk on the Great Ship which sailed between Macao and Nagasaki. Jesuit superiors in Rome frowned upon the practice, but since no satisfactory alternative was found, it continued as long as the mission to Japan lasted.²

In the question of finances the religious orders held an advantage over the secular clergy in that they had representatives at Court who could effectively lobby for the requests made by various provinces of an order. Secular priests as a group had no such representation and were forced to seek financial aid outside the usual administrative channels. A case in point is found in the Philippine Islands, where a long squabble developed over clerics' trading on the ship which carried Chinese silk each year from Manila to Acapulco. From the earliest years of the galleon trade, religious and secular priests enjoyed the same privileges as the Manila traders.³ But commercial activity was still looked upon as a shady affair, and clerical interest in the galleons was considered unfit for a man of the cloth. But this attitude stopped neither religious nor secular priests from participating in the trade with what must have been large capital investments. It is extremely difficult to ascertain just how much of their trading activity was due to real need for financial help and how much to a desire to amass capital. The few galleon registers which I have examined for the eighteenth century show little trading activity by the regular clergy. But it is known that religious corporations often sent bales of silk to Mexico under the name of a layman, and vice versa. To determine now which belonged to whom is practically impossible.

There is only one clerical group whose activity in the galleon trade can be examined with any degree of accuracy, the Ecclesiastical Cabildo of Manila. This group was composed of eleven secular priests who formed the chapter of the Manila cathedral and were technically chaplains to the King of Spain. In 1638 a royal order gave the canons and the religious permission to ship silk to Mexico, though it is known that their trading activity had preceded this order by over a half century. Forty-five years later, however, a decree suspended the clergy's right to participate in the trade. It was only restored in

² C. R. Boxer, *The Great Ship from Amacon, Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade, 1555-1640* (Lisbon, 1959), 39; also "Missionaries and Merchants of Macao, 1557-1687" in *Actas, Colóquio Internacional de Estudos Luso-Brasileiros. Lisboa—1957* (Lisbon, 1960), II, 210-224.

³ William L. Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York, 1959), 165.

1694 by Governor Fausto Cruzat y Góngora in view of the poverty of the Islands in general and the priests in particular.⁴ In 1699 a royal *cédula* approved the *cabildo*'s shipping 132 bundles of merchandise to Mexico. But the Manila merchants favored taking away the privilege altogether. It is difficult to see why, since between 1695 and 1698 the members of the Ecclesiastical *Cabildo* shipped an average of only fifty-eight bundles a year,⁵ and in 1699 no bundles at all were consigned under the chapter's name.

The main reason for the Ecclesiastical *Cabildo*'s participation in the galleon trade was the alleged insufficiency of their salaries. The dean of the chapter received 600 pesos a year, canons 400, prebendaries 300, and *medios* 200. On June 15, 1706, just four years after a *cédula* forbade religious or seculars to ship merchandise on the galleons, the priests wrote a letter to the king complaining of their poverty.⁶ With such salaries, they said, one could not maintain the dignity which the canon's office required. It is true that "dignity" in the colonial Philippines was a relative term. The Archbishop of Manila, for instance, was obliged by law to have his carriage drawn by no less than six horses. But the canons complained that their meager salaries hardly covered necessities and sometimes never arrived at all from Mexico. Medicine in time of sickness was beyond their means, they said, and if a tropical fever struck, it meant for the canons a trip to the hospital to die. This rather grim picture was repeated by the canons in 1709 and again in 1711. The last letter ended with the plea to restore the privilege of shipping 132 bales, a privilege which the *Cabildo* had possessed "from time immemorial."⁷

The repeated complaints brought no response from the Spanish government, for from 1723 the chapter was permitted to ship only forty-eight bundles of merchandise. Even a quota of 132 was relatively small since 3500 bundles were sent each year by the citizens of Manila. Yet in 1754-1755 the *Cabildo Eclesiástico* was assigned only forty pieces as its quota,⁸ and in the distribution of 1000 bales in 1778, the *Cabildo* was allotted only twenty-five pieces.⁹

The dispute over the propriety of clerical involvement in the

⁴ *Cabildo Eclesiástico to Philip V, Manila, June 28, 1727, Archivo General de Indias (hereafter cited as AGI), Filipinas, 294.*

⁵ "Traslado de las certificaciones . . . de lo que su Magestad tiene de renta," *Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Consejos, 21022, fols. 488-494.*

⁶ *Cabildo to King, AGI, Filipinas, 294.*

⁷ *Ibid.* For a similar letter, dated June 28, 1704, see AGI, Filipinas, 204.

⁸ "Testimonio auténtico . . . para el repartimiento del galeón . . . 1753," AGI, Filipinas, 934, fols. 318-319.

⁹ "Repartimiento de las 1000 piezas regulares de comercio, 1778," AGI, Filipinas, 932.

galleon trade did not begin in the eighteenth century, but in the sixteenth, almost as soon as the Manila-Mexico route was opened. In the seventeenth century one of the chief figures in the controversy was a Jesuit, Diego de Bobadilla, a professor of moral theology at the College of St. Ignatius in Manila.¹⁰ Bobadilla treated the moral aspects of the affair in a public lecture in Manila. This lecture, together with a number of other "cases of conscience" which the Jesuit analyzed, is preserved in a manuscript kept in the Jesuit archives at Barcelona.¹¹ Since I have found no other similar treatment of the question, it is difficult to say whether Bobadilla's opinion was representative of contemporary clerical thought on the matter. But in view of his tendency to oppose clerical involvement in the trade, it is probably safe to say that the Ecclesiastical Cabildo did not share his views. Whatever the case, Bobadilla's treatment of the problem at least throws light on several aspects of missionary life in the seventeenth-century Philippines and expresses one man's view of the thorny question as to whether clerics should take part in an activity which joined God and Mammon in a rather unconventional union. Before taking up in the lecture his own analysis of the galleon question, Bobadilla summarized a pamphlet published in 1627 by one Doctor Juan Oñez, who vigorously defended clerical participation in the galleon trade. Oñez had cited a former professor in the Jesuit College of St. Ignatius, Juan Ribera, as a supporter of his position.¹² Ribera believed that since clerics in the Philippines were poor, there was no reason why they could not trade a few bales of fabrics for their sustenance and for the maintenance of their house-

¹⁰ Bobadilla was born in Madrid in 1590 and after entering the Jesuits went to the Philippines in 1615. He taught philosophy for three years, theology for twelve and was rector of the Jesuit Colegio de San José in Manila for five years. He was named representative of the Philippine mission in 1635, and on his return from Rome in 1643 he brought with him forty-two missionary recruits. Bobadilla died in Leyte in 1648. A brief biography and bibliography of Bobadilla, which does not mention the San Cugat collection of his Moral Theology essays, are in Carlos Sommervogel, S. I., *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Brussels-Paris, 1890), I, cols. 1552-1553.

¹¹ "Segunda parte de las resoluciones de casos dadas en las conferencias de este colegio de la Compañía de Jesús de Manila por el padre Diego de Bobadilla, Provincial que fué de esta provincia. (Casos resueltos en este colegio de Manila en las conferencias ordinarias desde el mes de octubre de 1630)," *Archivum Provinciae Tarraconensis Societatis Iesu* (San Cugat del Vallés, Barcelona). The manuscript carries no press mark. H. de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768* (Cambridge, 1961), 354-358, summarizes a number of other cases treated by Bobadilla, using the San Cugat manuscript.

¹² Sommervogel does not include the *Interrogatorio* in his list of Ribera's writings. There is, however, a *Responsa Moralia*. Ribera was born in Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico, in 1565 and entered the Jesuits in 1595. He died in the Philippines in 1622. See Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque*, col. 1767.

holds. Because of their poverty, Oñez continued, a quota was allowed prelates and religious, and no objection was made by the citizens of Manila. Oñez thought that the poverty of clerics was an obvious fact and needed no proof. Their incomes were small and usually drawn from the Royal Treasury, a poor paymaster, he said. When Oñez wrote, payments were four years in arrears. No vineyards or olive groves were cultivated in the islands which could have helped to offset low salaries, he said, the best of which, 600 pesos to the dean of the chapter, was enough to cover only half his expenses. The justification for engaging in trading, concluded Oñez, was not desire for profit, but necessity, the same necessity which compelled the Jesuits in Japan to seek papal permission to trade between Nagasaki and Macao.¹³

Oñez skirted the difficulty of direct clerical participation in trade by the claim that all buying and selling was done through a third person. Since the ecclesiastical law forbidding trade to clerics was *odiosa*, he said, a strict interpretation should be placed on its meaning.¹⁴ Oñez concluded that since clerics did not actually put foot in the Chinese market, and Chinese brought the silks to their homes for packing by servants, the letter of the law was being strictly observed. Yet even if buying silk were illicit for clerics, they purchased so small a quantity as not to constitute a serious infraction of church law. The fact that only a few cases of fabrics were sent to Mexico also diminished the matter necessary to constitute a serious fault. On the rare occasions when more than two cases were sent by a cleric, Oñez said, they could be considered as sent *per modum unius*, simply an extension of the two permitted bales. Usually eight cases of cloth were bought from the Chinese at one time, and it was subsequently packed by servants without the cleric's laying hands on it. In all of this, continued Oñez, there was no *corruptela* (corruption) as some alleged. What was done out of necessity was not done out of disregard for the Sacred Canons. Not one cleric in the Philippines could be called rich, he said, because in the Islands not even 10,000 or 12,000 pesos constituted wealth. If one galleon was lost the people were without bread, no matter how much money they had. All of this, concluded Oñez, could be proven from the registers of the galleons.

Bobadilla began his comments on Oñez' position by establishing

¹³ Approval for Jesuit participation in the silk trade was requested and granted by Gregory XIII in 1582.

¹⁴ *Odiosa* (literally hateful) is a term still used by canon lawyers to describe a particularly onerous law, which, because of its restrictiveness, is usually interpreted in a most literal way, thereby limiting its scope.

a definition of *negociación lucrativa*, trading for profit. He defined it as the act of buying something with the intention of selling it for a profit in the same condition in which it was obtained, i.e., without increasing the value by improving or changing the goods.¹⁵ This type of trading was forbidden to clerics, he felt. But the difficulty, as Bobadilla saw it, was in ascertaining whether the trading conducted by the Manila clerics fell under that definition. Some said it did not, since the selling was done by a third person, the encomendero in Mexico, and not by the cleric. Bobadilla showed no patience with this interpretation:¹⁶

Muy leve fundamento es éste para querer atropellar una ley eclesiástica tan antigua en la iglesia de Dios por la qual no se prohíbe solamente el comprar y vender justamente, sino sólo el comprar con ánimo de vender la misma cosa, ora la venda por sí ora por tercera persona, y así dice el derecho, *qui rem comparat ut integram et immutatam vendendo, lucretur ille mercatur est*. De suerte que si una compra una grande cantidad de ropa con ánimo de ganar, volviendo a vender, o por otra causa no la pudiese vender, *eo ipso* que la compró con aquel fin quebrantó el precepto eclesiástico y confirmase ésto porque habrá alguno que niega que todos los seglares de Manila que encajonan y enfardelan para la Nueva España son mercaderes, atreverase alguno decir que los de Sevilla no son mercaderes pues si es cierto que los unos y los otros lo son aunque ello no venden la mercadería por sus personas sino que la embían a vender a México luego el clérigo que hace lo mismo en Philipinas se dirá con todo rigor mercader y contravendrá a las leyes eclesiásticas, luego no es necesario comprar y vender justamente por mano propia, sino bastará comprar *ut eadem rem imutatam vendendo lucretur*. Ni el derecho puso la copulativa *et* que se finge.

Oñez also alleged that clerical trading had been approved of by the Bishop of Manila. Bobadilla thought otherwise:

No hará poco quien probare esto, porque lo que yo sabré decir es que el señor arzobispo don Francisco Miguel García¹⁷ mandó que ningún clérigo cargase hilo de ropa para la Nueva España sin avisar a su señoría para averiguar si el cargarlo era por necesidad de tal clérigo o sólo cargaba para que de allá le correspo[n]diesen con los regalos o otras cosas necesarias a su causa, lo qual no es trato prohibido como después diremos, y lo que mas fuera hace en esta parte es que corriendo la misma los clérigos en tiempo del señor Don Diego Vázquez de Mercado,¹⁸ su señoría por un auto que hizo

¹⁵ "*Cumque rem aliquam comprat eo animo ut integram, et non mutatam vendendo, lucretur.*" fol. 30.

¹⁶ Caso 1, fols. 30-31.

¹⁷ Don Francisco Miguel García Serrano, an Augustinian, was promoted to the see of Manila in 1618. He was previously bishop of Nueva Segovia in the Philippines.

¹⁸ Don Diego Vázquez y Mercado arrived in Manila as its new archbishop in 1610 and promptly involved himself with the religious orders in a squabble over episcopal visitation of mission residences. The long and bitter dispute was carried by Vázquez' successors well into the eighteenth century.

en el mes de diciembre de 1610 declaró que nunca había tal uso y costumbre en Philipinas y ninguno lo podía mejor declarar porque su señoría había sido el fundador de la catedral de Manila y el que mejor podía saber de los usos y costumbres de la clerecía en esta tierra. De todo lo cual so colige ser este trato de Philipinas el que el derecho prohíbe a los clérigos y que no hay razón ninguna para santificar el tal trato.¹⁹

The obligation upon clerics in Holy Orders to avoid trading on the galleons was placed by Bobadilla in a very high category, binding under serious sin. This he deduced from the fact that the theologians Navarro and Molina and the Council of Trent put on such activities the serious penalties of suspension and excommunication. Nevertheless, Bobadilla thought that a cleric had to trade to the value of 1000 or 2000 pesos to incur such a penalty. This was a considerable increase in the necessary matter for serious sin, since Juan de Ribera had said that an *oidor* of the *audiencia* (forbidden to trade as a government official) incurred serious sin by trading as little as 200-250 pesos.²⁰

But did a case exist which would allow a cleric to send goods to Mexico for trading purposes? Yes, answered Bobadilla, the case of physical necessity. If a cleric were so indigent as to want for the necessities of life, then he could with clear conscience buy and sell. This was because the law which forbade trading to clerics was a positive precept, and positive precepts did not oblige if they involved grave inconvenience. The only condition that Bobadilla placed on the needy cleric was that he could not trade in "indecent things," i.e., playing cards or women's make-up.

Resta vez si por razón de necesidad todos los clérigos de Philipinas pueden contratar y estar excusados de la ley que se lo prohíbe, ello decía que sí, mas a mí parece excusa fingida y aparente por que es cosa llana que no todos si no los menos tienen necesidad. Primeramente, los beneficiados y curas de doctrinas no la tienen por que sus curatos son muy congrua sustentación que si no lo fueran no se pudieran ordenar, como se ordenan a título de ellos y el gasto es mucho menor en una doctrina, otros curatos de por acá como él de los indios en Manila y él de los españoles, él de Santiago de Bagumbaya y él de Cavite valen mil o dos mil pesos. Las prebendas de la catedral son muy suficientes pues la menor que es de medio racionero tiene doscientos pesos; da el rey doscientos de capellanías anejas que sirve el cabildo y casi doscientos de misas de colecturía (que le dan quince pesos al mes) que vienen

¹⁹ Caso 1, fols. 32-32v.

²⁰ Governors, judges of the *audiencia*, and galleon officials were long prohibited from taking part in the galleon trade, primarily because it was feared they would monopolize the trade, which in fact they sometimes did. In the new regulations published in 1726 galleon officials were permitted to ship merchandise to Mexico because it was thought that they would be more likely to defend the galleons from attack and they would also give more attention to legitimate trading interests.

a ser seiscientos pesos al año, fuera de los entierros de cabildo, varas del santísimo sacramento, entierros ordinarios y misas que les sobra y capellanías particulares que tienen casi todos; y todo viene a valer mucho al cabo del año y parece muy congrua sustentación para un clérigo honrado y virtuoso que no juega ni tiene otros desaguaderos. Pues los racioneros enteros tienen cien pesos mas el rey les da trescientos y los canónigos doscientos pesos por darle el rey cuatrocientos y las dignidades trescientos más porque quinientos da el rey a cada uno y seiscientos al dean; pues cómo pueden decir, siendo esto así que tratan y contratan por necesidad? . . . Otros no tienen rentas ningunas eclesiásticas sino diez o veinte o treinta mil pesos que traen al trato para sustentarse y a los tales se les dice que compren posesiones de casas, estancias, tierras, etc., pues éste les es lícito y con ello se sustentan algunas religiones²¹ y si no quieren tener esos cuidados den su dinero a otros y contraten por tercera persona, pues el derecho les permite esto como veremos en el caso 7°, que claro está hay en Manila personas de plena confianza y si de ninguno se fian, den su dinero a daño a 75%, pues esto se juzga por justificado de suerte que con ochenta mil pesos ganarán dos mil cada año. Mas es el caso que la codicia de los tales no se contenta con poca donde se vee que es pura codicia y no necesidad el querer contratar por sus personas. Restan algunos clérigos que no tienen ni beneficio eclesiástico ni hacienda alguna y de los tales no hay dificultad por que si no tienen con que no tratarán y es cierto que en doce con una sobrepelliz a la catedral para acudir a todo lo que se ofrece de entierros, varas del santísimo sacramento etc. que me dicen ganarán cada día tres tostones a dos pesos como los ganaba un clérigo que murió llamado Zamora, con que se pueden honradamente sustentar así por vía de necesidad, no quedan los clérigos de Philipinas desobligados de la ley que les prohíbe el contratar y el decir necesidad, escolar y capa que algunos dan a su codicia.²²

Another type of business transaction was allowed clerics by Bobadilla. They could buy and sell if the value of the goods bought was increased by industry and work. The reason why Bobadilla, along with the majority of canonists, approved of this, was that the goods sold were different from those bought, having been transformed in the process of industry. The profit arises, Bobadilla argued, not from the goods themselves but from the work involved in their transformation. Thus a cleric could buy silk, have stockings made from it, then sell them in Mexico or Manila. Or he could purchase cotton

²¹ Practically all religious orders in the Philippines had estates from which revenue was drawn. An interesting account of the day-to-day operations of the Jesuit estates can be gleaned from the instructions sent by the provincials to the Jesuit lay brother in charge of the Tunisian hacienda; likewise preserved in the San Cugat archives, no title and no press mark. The Jesuit haciendas in Mexico are examined in François Chevalier, *Land and Society in Colonial Mexico. The Great Hacienda* (Berkeley, 1963), 239-250, and in the same author's edition of *Instrucciones a los hermanos jesuitas administradores de haciendas* (México, 1950). Jesuit estates in Peru have been recently studied in Pablo Macera (ed.), *Instrucciones para el manejo de las haciendas jesuitas del Perú (ss. XVII-XVIII)*, *Nueva crónica* (Lima, 1966).

²² Caso 5, fols. 36-36v.

and have clothes made “but always paying the Indians a just salary for their work. . . .” Bobadilla would even allow clerics to own textile factories, as long as scandal could be avoided. This privilege was allowed to oidores, alcaldes mayores, and other government officials prohibited from trading on the galleons, and Bobadilla saw no reason why clerics should be excluded. But again, he placed the condition of excluding the production of “indecent things.”

Still another business transaction, though it was not strictly trading, was sanctioned by Bobadilla. This involved sending merchandise instead of money to Mexico in order to purchase items considered necessary in the Philippines. Bobadilla’s precedent was the religious missionaries of India who sent merchandise to Portugal for sale there, using the profits to purchase what they needed for their houses in the Orient. This was not *negotiatio*, he insisted, but good economics, for the purchasing power of fabrics was greater than that of specie. Therefore, clerics from the Philippines could send a *cajón* or *fardillo* to Mexico and receive in return books, chocolate, *cajetas*, *pañó*, and other necessities. Clerics going to and from Spain as representatives of the colony could likewise carry merchandise instead of silver to cover their traveling expenses. Similarly, a cleric could buy in abundance what he needed and afterwards sell it in time of necessity. Bobadilla approved of this expedient for the Philippines, since there frequently occurred a shortage of certain goods which could be partially relieved by those possessing plenty. As long as the goods were not originally bought with the intention of afterwards selling them, it was foresight to provide for periods of scarcity, and not speculation.

Bobadilla passed over lightly the interesting example of a cleric who allowed a layman to speculate with his money on the galleons. Since the church law prohibiting trading was *odiosa*, a strict interpretation could be attached to it. “In this case the cleric is not trading, but the agent is the one who puts his hand to the buying and selling.”²³ It is difficult to see how Bobadilla could square this statement with the opinion he expressed commenting on Oñez’ paper, but the distinction was a fine one and apparently satisfied him. What seems a more natural and therefore acceptable form of activity would be the cultivation of farms and sale of their produce. But Bobadilla disapproved except in cases of necessity, though clerics might use the products themselves as was so often done in Spain.

If clerics contravened the precept forbidding trading activity, Bobadilla believed they should lose their clerical privileges after three admonitions by the bishop. And he concluded:

²³ Caso 10, fol. 40.

Advierten más que de todo trato lícito por cualquier modo a los clérigos no deben pagar tributo ni alcabala por ser exentos e imunes por derecho, pero sí lo deben de cualquiera negociación y contrato que les es prohibido y que no pueden lícitamente ejercitar.²⁴

Bobadilla's arguments probably had little effect on clerical traders. In 1737 Archbishop Juan Ángel Rodríguez of Manila expelled a large number of non-Spanish clerics from the Islands because they were simply acting as agents for Dutch, Portuguese, and French merchants.²⁵ The arguments had even less effect on the *Mesa de la Misericordia*, the large-scale banking and charitable organization which provided the financial motor for the galleon trade. By the time Bobadilla wrote, this organization, largely in the hands of the religious orders, had become the chief supplier of trading capital. Its organization and development still await systematic scrutiny, and its study is certain to provide the economic and financial key to the understanding of the trade which linked the Orient and Spanish America for over two hundred years.

²⁴ Caso 12, fols. 40-42.

²⁵ Archbishop Juan Ángel to Philip V, Manila, February 3, 1737, AGI, Filipinas, 291.