The Spaniards have a saying (which has an equivalent in many other languages) that nothing ever happens, no matter how bad, which does not also bring about some good. *No hay mal que por bien no venga.* That was certainly the case with the Communist revolution in China. The expulsion of the missionaries from China brought to our shores many Jesuit priests, brothers and scholastics, who individually and collectively, did an enormous amount of good in the Philippines. For one thing, the coming of so many priests of various nationalities was a great blessing to the Jesuit missions in Mindanao, where the American and Filipino Jesuits had been too few for the vast territories to be covered.

For another, the ex-China missionaries revitalized the apostolate among the Chinese in the Philippines, culminating in the establishment of three excellent schools intended primarily for the Chinese: Xavier School in Manila, Sacred Heart School in Cebu, and Santa Maria School in Iloilo.

Apart from the work done by the ex-China missionaries
as a group, outstanding services were rendered by individual Jesuits among them. One of the most active and most productive was Fr. Pedro S. de Achutegui, who died in Manila on 28 December 1998.

His services to the Church in the Philippines may be gauged from the positions he held as national secretary of various commissions and committees of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. (In ecclesiastical affairs, the secretary of a commission or committee is often the one who does most of the work.)

For twenty years (1967-1987) he was National Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Christian Unity, and during part of that time (1978-1984) he was concurrently National Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Unbelievers. He was Secretary of the Executive Committee that prepared for the Papal Visit of 1981. He was also Executive Secretary of the Commission that prepared for the yearlong celebration of the Fourth Centennial of the Manila Archdiocese, and he served as Secretary General of the Fourth Archdiocesan Synod of Manila (1979).

Much of the work for the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines of 1991 was done by him, both as Assistant National Coordinator and as Assistant Secretary General of the Council.

He was theological adviser to the bishops who constituted the Philippine delegations to the various sessions of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, namely those for 1977, 1980, 1983, 1985, 1987, and 1990. His services were particularly helpful at the Extraordinary Synod concerning the Sacrament of Penance.

The Papal Curia used his services as Consultor to two

All this work for the Church in the Philippines and for the Universal Church was done in addition to his regular duties as professor of theology, as administrator, writer, editor and publisher. We shall mention some of this work presently.

A Basque Missionary

He was born in Bilbao in the Basque region of Spain on May 1, 1915. After classical studies in Vizcaya and in Navarre, he entered the Jesuit novitiate in Tournai, Belgium. It was the Spanish novitiate of Loyola, now in exile, for the Spanish Republican Government had expelled the Jesuits from Spain. His entrance day was the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 14 September 1931.

Sent to China after the Juniorate, he learned Chinese and then made the three-year course in philosophy in Hopeh and the four-year course in theology at Zikawei, earning the licentiate degree summa cum laude in both faculties.

The same highest honors (summa cum laude) were accorded him later when he obtained the doctorate in theology at the Gregorian University in Rome (1950).

He had been ordained priest in Shanghai on 7 June 1944, and had made the tertianship in Wuhu. It was while he was studying for the doctorate in Rome that he was admitted to the Solemn profession, which he pronounced in the Church of the Gesu on 2 February 1949.

Returning to China he was assigned to teach at the Wuhu Regional Seminary in Anhwei. It was from there that he was
expelled, together with the other missionaries, and thus came to the Philippines.

In the Philippines

In China before the expulsion, the Jesuit missionaries from various countries had worked in separate missions, each with its own territory, all of them independent of each other. In the Philippines after the expulsion, they were merged into one Mission under a Visitor at first, later, when the Mission had become a Province, under a Provincial. Under this united command, the houses of formation were quickly reestablished: the novitiate and juniorate at Tunkung Mangga beyond Novaliches; the Chinese language school and the three-year philosophy course in quonset huts at Mandaluyong; the theologate in Baguio.

Fr. Achútegui, after a stint of teaching at the Hong Kong Regional Seminary in Aberdeen, at first taught Critica to the students of philosophy. When the theologate was reconstituted in 1952 he became the first rector. (The official title was vice-rector to avoid canonical problems. The Rector of an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Theology would have had to be appointed by the Pope.)

The theologate, transferred from Zikawei to Baguio, was housed for one year in the Dominican villa house on Dominican Hill. Then it moved to the Observatory buildings on Mirador Hill, where it remained several years until transferred to more permanent quarters in Taipei. They were fortunate to have been able to take out of China the major part of the excellent theological library of Zikawei.

Fr. Achútegui governed the theologate at Baguio for six years and then remained there teaching dogmatic and fundamental theology, until the theologate was moved to Taipei.
He himself did not go to Taipei with the rest of the faculty, but instead moved to the newly constituted Loyola School of Theology on the Ateneo de Manila campus in Quezon City, where he taught fundamental and dogmatic Theology.

Shortly after this he was officially reassigned to the Philippine Province, and eventually obtained Filipino citizenship.

One of his mere significant services to the Philippine Church was during his six-year term as Praeses (President) of the Loyola School of Theology (1983-1989): he made arrangements so that the graduates of the Loyola School of Theology could be granted the licentiate by the theological faculty of Taipei of which he had been the head during its sojourn in Baguio.

Religious Revolution

It was during his years in Baguio, where he had dealings with Ilocano priests and lay persons, that Fr. Achútegui heard of the Aglipayan movement and the Philippine Independent Church, founded in the period of the Revolution by a former Catholic priest, Gregorio Aglipay. Achútegui became interested and began to collect material on the subject. He was an avid and efficient collector: anything and everything that had even the remotest connection with the matter went into his files: books, pamphlets, articles, letters, photographs, scraps of information, etc. When he had enough material to fill several drawers of a filing cabinet, he approached the present writer and suggested collaboration on writing a book about the Aglipayan movement.

I declined at first. Although I was much interested in Philippine history and had dabbled in some historical writing, I was not a trained professional historian. My training had been largely in literature. But Achútegui was very insistent and so were some members of the Chinese mission. I was
given the impression that my work would be very simple, consisting simply in translating what Achútegui would write in Spanish.

After I had agreed to the collaboration, I found that this was not the case; the work involved considerable original research on my part, both in the Philippines and abroad. It also involved writing the books myself. But Achútegui’s contribution was essential, as, without the material he had amassed and the funds he had procured, the work would have been impossible.

Our first volume came out in 1960, entitled: *Religious Revolution in the Philippines: The Life and Work of Gregorio Aglipay, Volume I*. The book was launched at a very poorly attended reception held in the BOOKMARK bookshop on Pinpin Street and the Escolta. But that initial failure to attract attention was soon overcome, largely by word of mouth, those who had read the book giving it enthusiastic praise. As some of those who praised the book were people of prominence (like Claro M. Recto and members of the diplomatic corps) this first volume sold well, and the following year we were able to put out a second edition, slightly revised.

Our second volume came out in 1967, and a second edition in 1968. There were more than three hundred changes. Most of those were small: a change of word or a change of sentence. But they were of some importance taken collectively. For instance, in our first edition we referred to the splintered Aglipayan groups as “sects.” In our second edition, in compliance with the spirit of the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, they were called “Churches.”

Our third volume came out in 1971, subtitled: *The Religious Coup d’Etat, 1898-1901: A Documentary History*. The fourth and last volume — a Documentary Appendix to the
entire work — came out in 1972. This time the book-launching was very well attended. It was held, not in a bookstore (as in the case of the first volume) but in the large hall of the Philippine Columbian Club on Taft Avenue.

That was in fact a double book-launching: presented to the public on the same occasion was another book by Fr. Achútegui and myself, entitled: *Aguinaldo and the Revolution of 1896, a Documentary History*.

**Cardinal Bea Institute**

It was his research on Aglipayanism and the subsequent decree on ecumenism of Vatican II that got Fr. Achútegui interested in the ecumenical movement. He organized at the Loyola House of Studies an ecumenical center of studies which he named the Cardinal Bea Institute, in honor of the Jesuit Cardinal Augustin Bea, one of the great figures of Vatican II, whom the Pope had subsequently appointed President of the Papal Secretariat for Christian Unity.

The Cardinal Bea Institute and the John XXIII Ecumenical Center became in time a thriving mini-publishing house, printing affordable editions of papal and other church documents. Associated with the Cardinal Bea Institute was a special library, which Achútegui called the "Sala Testor" after the Spanish benefactor who had provided the funds for it.

Perhaps one of the most important of his publishing ventures — and one that received international recognition in theological circles — was the series of monographs on theological and missiological subjects. The series was entitled *Cardinal Bea Studies*. Some eleven volumes have been published.
This work in the ecumenical movement, caught the attention of the Philippine bishops, and they appointed Achútегui executive secretary of the various commissions we enumerated earlier.

It was doubtless his work at the various sessions of the Synod of Bishops in Rome that also caught the attention of the Papal Curia, and he was appointed consultor to the Secretariat for Unbelievers and the Congregation for the Clergy.

Besides this ecumenical and publishing work that he had taken up on his own, Achútегui was generous with his time and energies in behalf of the Jesuit community with whom he lived. For a while he was their treasurer.

He was also editor and publisher of the theological journal *Landas* and other publications of the theologate. He was also assistant archivist of the Philippine Province.

**Change of Attitude**

This work for the ecumenical movement produced a great change in Fr. Achútегui’s own attitude towards non-Catholics. When we were working on the first two volumes of *Religious Revolution*, his attitude toward Aglipay and the Aglipayan movement was harsh and intransigent. Being a Spaniard he accepted without question the uncompromising and condemnatory attitude of the Spanish friars. But in human affairs, there are few absolute heroes and few absolute villains. Few things are totally black or white, but are various shades of grey. The Aglipayan rebellion, though canonically wrong and indefensible, was a very understandable human reaction to policies and practices in the Philippine Catholic Church which also were in themselves very wrong and oppressive.
Achútegui’s interest in the ecumenical movement after Vatican II, and his contact with persons related to the principal figures in the Aglipayan movement, softened that intransigent attitude. He became in time sympathetic to those whom the Vatican Council did not call enemies but “separated brethren.”

Characteristics

Fr. Achútegui’s productivity was made possible by a happy combination of qualities, natural and supernatural. To begin with, he had a genuine desire to promote the glory of God and the good of the Church. The phrase “burning zeal” is a trite cliché, but in Achútegui’s case, it comes close to an accurate description.

To this supernatural motivation were added some natural qualities. He had boundless energy. He seemed tireless. Repeated heart attacks did not diminish his activity. Also (perhaps due to his Basque heritage and his upbringing) he was very methodical, very orderly, very precise.

Also (and this was part of his boundless energy) he was impatient of delay. If anything had to be done, it must be done at once. No procrastination. I have often thought of him in connection with a phrase in Shakespeare’s Macbeth: “the firstlings of the mind will be the firstlings of the hand.” He himself used to say, “Pertenezco a la congregación del Cuanto Antes.” (I belong to the society of “The Sooner the Better.”)

Being human, Achútegui’s virtues carried with them their own defects. Because he was impatient of delay, he wanted instant action where temporary restraint might have been more prudent. He wanted immediate publication of things
that perhaps would have improved with slow maturing.

Also, he saw things so clearly himself that he was insensitive to the viewpoints of others. He was also touchy about what he thought were his prerogatives. But he was always the gentleman. He could be forthright and blunt, but he would remain polite. And he had a resilient cheerfulness.

It may require some time before the Philippine Province and the Philippine hierarchy can fully appreciate the extent of their indebtedness to Fr. Achútegui. Meanwhile, from the sidelines, this writer is one of those who believe that Mao Tse-tung and the other Communists were acting as God’s agents when they expelled the missionaries from China and thus brought to our shores men of the caliber of Pedro S. de Achútegui.