

## BOOK REVIEW

*Manuel Grijalvo, Un Obispo Burgales en Filipinas.*  
**By Roberto Blanco Andrés. Burgos:  
Publicaciones de la Excma. Diputación de  
Burgos, 2011. 88 pages, plates.**

*Grace Liza Y. Concepcion*

University of Asia and the Pacific

This brief biography is one among many published works by Roberto Blanco Andrés, a Spanish historian who specializes in the history of religious orders in the Philippines, particularly the Augustinians. The aim of the present work is simple. It is to recount Fray Manuel Grijalvo's life as a religious priest who occupied key positions in the Augustinian Order and in the Philippine church as bishop of Nueva Caceres (now Naga) in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when both the Order and the church in the Philippines were undergoing transition. This succinct narration of an Augustinian bishop's life opens a window through which one can appreciate Philippine history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although brief, the summary of Grijalvo's years in the Philippines, spent in Manila and Nueva Caceres, gives a relatively complete view of the challenges that the Catholic Church was facing in this era, both within the Augustinian Order and in the Diocese of Nueva Caceres. This is so because Grijalvo was an Augustinian missionary who also occupied key posts as parish priest in Batangas towns (1814-1818) and in Pasig (1833-1839 and 1831-1847). He was also procurator and prior of the Order between 1818 and 1832. In 1848, he was appointed bishop of Nueva Caceres, a post he occupied until his death in 1861. His life, therefore, encapsulates the struggles and challenges of the Philippine Catholic Church and the Spanish colonial government.

The work is divided into five chapters, each relating a significant period in Grijalvo's life. In chapter 1, the author discusses Fray Manuel Grijalvo's early life in the villa of Los Balbases in Burgos, Spain. He also relates Grijalvo's entry to the Augustinian Order. Chapter 2 recounts Grijalvo's life as a parish priest in the Philippines. After his arrival in Manila in 1811, Grijalvo continued his studies

at the convent of San Agustín. Between 1814 and 1848, he handled parishes in Batangas and Pasig, though not continuously because he also occupied the posts of prior and other governance positions in the Order. Chapters 3 to 5 recount his deeds whilst he was prior and provincial of the Philippine Augustinians and as bishop of Nueva Caceres. In relating the difficulties that Grijalvo faced both as prior of the Order and as bishop, the author also provides the historical context of these problems. The work thus gives another view of the 19th-century friar, which modifies the infamous image of the grasping and immoral religious. However, Blanco is not silent on the relaxation of some Augustinians during Grijalvo's time as superior. He relates in detail some disciplinary cases that Grijalvo addressed. Chapter 3, "El religioso exigente" (The demanding religious) and chapter 4, "En frente de la Provincia Agustiniiana" (At the Helm of the Augustinian Province), are important because they narrate Grijalvo's role in reviving the religious life and customs of the Augustinians in the Philippines. Chapter 4, in particular, describes the situation of the Augustinian Province during the era of the *regularization* of parishes, or the cession of parishes from secular to regular clergy. This issue, of course, lies at the core of the problem of the secular clergy, which later on ignited the nationalist struggle. The author also discusses the transfer of Samar and Leyte to the Franciscans, and the attempts of the Augustinian Order to return to a stricter observance of their rule. The final chapter is about Grijalvo's role as bishop of Nueva Caceres. Parishes in this diocese had been, for years, handled by Franciscan and secular clergy. However, there had been more non-Franciscan bishops assigned to head the diocese. Grijalvo was one of them. This chapter discusses the dispute with the Franciscans with regard to Albay. The author explains, quite clearly, that there were other socio-economic factors at play in the Albay problem, which was further complicated by the commercial interests of the Spaniards in the abaca business. Aside from this controversy, the chapter also contains a wealth of information on the state of the parishes in the diocese.

One characteristic of this book, which many will consider its handicap, is the absence of any theoretical framework to understand Grijalvo's life and the bishop's role in the colonial dynamics of 19th-century Philippines. It will be the reader's task to situate Grijalvo and find his significance in Philippine history, which makes engaging with this work quite a challenge.

Finally, the author deserves praise for his excellent research. His book is the result of patient archival work in a number of libraries, including the archive of the Augustinian Province of the Philippines in Valladolid and the archives

of the Philippine Province in Manila. As a preliminary work on Grijalvo, Blanco's latest publication will prove to be a useful reference material for future researchers on Philippine church history. The language of the book, however, will limit its readership to those who know Spanish.

---

**Grace Liza Y. Concepcion** <grace.concepcion@uap.sia> is an Instructor at the Department of History, University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P). She holds a BA Humanities (UA&P) and a BA (Honours) in English (Witwatersrand, South Africa). She finished her Master of Arts in History at the University of Navarre (Spain) in 2010. She is pursuing her doctoral studies at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Her area of interest is history of education in the Spanish colonial period.