

The Black Nazarene of Manila:
Notes on the *Myths and Miracles of the Nazareno de Quiapo*
by Audrey Morallo and Lito Zulueta,
published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*¹

What is a *myth*? The Oxford dictionary (1995th edition, p. 900) defines it as "a widely held but false notion." In these notes I do not just clarify the so-called myths declared in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* by the Morallo-Zulueta article. We simply bring out the testimonies and facts based on reliable Augustinian Recollect contemporaries and historians and then make conclusions from their statements.

What we will further point out are the glaring historical blunders, conjectures and false conclusions occasioned probably by the failure of the two writers of the article to make use of primary sources at the Archivo Recoleta, Recollect libraries, chroniclers, historians or authors of the Augustinian Recollect Order and or by basing their article on authors who may not never set foot at the Recollect archives in Spain or Quezon City. Most probably, they never consulted primary sources whether manuscripts, published chronicles or historical accounts in those archives or in Recollect libraries. These corrections and clarifications have to be done before their blunders and conjectures may in turn become myths themselves, as they may be quoted, copied and perpetuated by other writers or even by historians in the future or even in the coming fiestas of the Black Nazarene every 9th January.

The coauthors Morallo and Zulueta contend that the Black Nazarene of Quiapo, Manila, whose feast is the 9th of January, is biggest Catholic devotion in the Philippines is nothing but a myth. They cited the late Dominican historian Fidel Villaruel who preferred the Santo Niño de Cebu of the Augustinians as the biggest devotion. But if we base the combined multitudes of devotees of the Black Nazarene at the *Pahalik* in Luneta, *Dungaw* at Plaza del Carmen and the *Traslación* from Luneta to the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, we can clearly observe the millions of Filipinos who profess deep devotion and firmly believe in *Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno*. It is noteworthy that the devotion to the Santo Niño includes

¹ Retrieved from <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/283887/myths-miracles-nazareno-de-quiapo/#ixzz53aBNRrMk>.

the festivals in Iloilo, Cebu and Tondo as well as the parishes whose patron is the Divine Child.

It is safe to avoid the discussion on the magnitude of hugeness of the devotion to the Santo Niño or Black Nazarene as both refer to the same devotion to Our Lord Jesus Christ whom we profess to be the Incarnate God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The two devotions manifest the Filipinos' profound and solid Catholic Faith displayed in religious processions and reverent kissing the age-old icons. Both deepen the Filipinos' complete confidence in God's mercy and compassion and rely totally on Divine Providence at all times.

Cognizant of the Iconoclastic Controversy in the Byzantine Empire of the 6th century, the Church Fathers taught the doctrine that Catholics, both Roman and Orthodox, never worshipped graven images. Catholic theologians and priests further teach that Black Nazarene devotees do not worship the age-old image itself, but the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ represented by the blackened icon.

Theology professors often cite the usual example of a man or woman who kisses the photograph of a loved one. The person does not show affection for the photograph and pour out his or her love for it but on the beloved represented by the picture. In the same manner that government officials show reverence and honor by offering bouquets or wreaths to and bowing their heads before a life-size concrete or metal statue symbolizing a hero or heroine or before the Filipino flag symbolizing the country. Consequently, devotees do not worship nor adore the images of the Santo Niño or the Black Nazarene, they adore and worship the Lord Jesus Christ, represented by the images. This is repeatedly and consistently taught in homilies, catechism classes, in theology courses and religious education courses in Catholic institutions of learning.

The *Inquirer* authors' second myth is that "Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno" is not the original icon now venerated by hundreds of thousands of Catholic devotees in the Basilica Minore of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo or along the streets of Manila every 9th January, Good Friday or 31st December, for centuries. Morallo and Zulueta claim that the original icon was totally destroyed "when World War II laid Intramuros to waste."

It is a fact that most of the Spanish churches, convents and other edifices in the Walled City were destroyed by American shelling. It is also true that San Nicolas Church, popularly known as Recoletos Church, lost its roofs

and the grandiose retablos and icons inside the age-old temple during the Liberation of Manila, with only its walls left standing. The ruined church was eventually levelled to the ground in 1959. See *Simbahan at Kumbento ng Recoletos* marker installed at Recoletos Street corner Muralla Street in Intramuros by the National Historical Institute on 7 December 2006. Of the four revered sacred images of Recoletos Church (*Virgen de la Salud*, *Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno*, *San José* and *Santa Lucía*), dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries, solely the small *Virgen de la Salud* icon which arrived in Manila in 1634 was saved from shelling by US Army howitzers at the liberated University of Santo Tomas campus.

The Spanish Augustinian Recollect Fray Severino Cuesta (1925-2000), a San Sebastian Convent resident from 1947 until his demise, disclosed to this writer that a confrere narrated to him how a US Army officer positioned himself inside a belfry of San Sebastian Basilica with binoculars during the Liberation of Manila in 1945. The same officer directed the shelling by American howitzers stationed at the compound of the University of Santo Tomas at their targets in Intramuros where they believed Japanese troops were holed up.

Fr. Emil A. Quilatan, Church History professor in various theology schools and Archivo Recoleta Administrator for years, informed this writer that there exists an oral tradition claiming that there used to be two images of *Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* in the Recoletos Church of Intramuros: one was in the lateral chapel and another in the sacristy of the church. The same tradition contends that the second image was handed over to Saint John the Baptist Church in Quiapo in 1787 by the Recollect friars upon orders of Archbishop Basilio Tomas Sancho de Santas Justa y Rufina, Archbishop of Manila (1767-1787).

Among Recollect historians, it is an accepted fact that the Black Nazarene devotion is, definitely, not 413 years old today. The first group of thirteen Augustinian Recollects had left Cebu where they had landed on 12 May 1606 brought with them the images of *Virgen de la Correa* [*Nuestra Señora de la Consolación*, Our Lady of Consolation] and of *San Nicolás de Tolentino*. After a couple of weeks, the pioneers proceeded to Manila and arrived at the capital on 31 May.

Since the Recollect sources were silent on the exact date of arrival of the Black Nazarene icon, we can only deduce from undeniable facts: the eyewitness account written by the Recollect contemporary chronicler Fr.

Andres del Espiritu Santo (1585-1657) on their first Recollect mission. This chronicle was published in 1965 in pages 174-179, no. 600, of *Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de San Nicolás de Tolentino de las Islas Filipinas*.² Fr. Andrés del Espíritu Santo in 1647 made no mention of the Black Nazarene in his list of divine images found in Recoletos Church in Intramuros. Father Rafael Garcia, *Boletín Oficial* editor, puts the year 1645 as the date of this early contemporary account. In this early chronicle, only three sacred images and their year of arrival were mentioned by Fr. Andres del Espiritu Santo: *Virgen de la Correa* (1606), *San Nicolas de Tolentino* (1606) and *Virgen de la Salud* (1634). The image of *Virgen del Carmen* in San Sebastian Church which was brought by the third mission led by Father Rodrigo de San Miguel to the Philippines, a gift of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Mexico City, was left unmentioned by Fr. Andres de Espiritu Santo because the 400-year old Marian icon which arrived in 1618, was later enshrined in 1621 at the small church located at San Sebastian de Calumpang outside the walled city of colonial Manila.

There was indeed a big doubt that cast upon the fourth centenary of the Black Nazarene icon in Quiapo in 2006. It was intended by its organizers to coincide with the Recoletos 400 or the commemoration of the 400 years of uninterrupted presence of Augustinian Recollect missionaries in the Philippines and Asia. However, the Recollect archival sources and history did not categorically confirm the arrival of the Black Nazarene in 1606. Just the same, the “Quiapo clergy who mounted the fiesta in 2006 had billed the celebration as the ‘fourth centenary’ of the icon,” as noted by the Inquirer writers Audrey Morallo and Lito Zulueta.

Recollect historians, obviously, were not consulted on the commemoration by Quiapo Shrine authorities. During the liturgical rites at the Basilica Minore of Quiapo in 2006, Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales, then Archbishop of Manila, had invited Fr. Lauro Larlar OAR, then Prior Provincial of the Province of Saint Ezekiel Moreno, informed the Recollect superior why they were celebrating the fourth centenary of the Black Nazarene. The fourth centennial had been earlier recommended by the members of Quiapo historical committee. Since there was a quandary with respect to the exact year of the arrival of the Black Nazarene, Cardinal Rosales informed the prior provincial that the historical committee suggested the dual

² BSNP, Bulletin of the Province of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino of the Philippine Islands, is the official newsletter which contains official communications, year-reports of Recollect communities and historical articles and is sent to all houses of the Province of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino in Europe, America, Africa and Asia.

celebration of *Nazareno 400* and *Recoletos 400*. The corrected celebration of the Black Nazarene arrival is to be done if further archival research would unearth in the future the exact arrival date.

Going back to the alleged ranking or competition between the Black Nazarene or the Santo Niño as the biggest Catholic devotion in the country, I think such ranking or competition of popular devotion to Jesus, to Mary under her various invocations, or to the saints, is simply out of place in Catholic tradition and belief. I personally believe that it is exceedingly difficult to quantify any Catholic devotion by the name of physical and numerical presence of devotees during the celebration of their fiestas. The criterion or gauge of popularity or hugeness of a devotion cannot be quantified or made by the number of devotees in attendance at a religious procession or *Traslación* event.

Now if we count the number of parishes devoted to Santo Niño in the Philippine dioceses like those of Calapan, Cagayan de Oro, Bacolod, Talibon, or in the provinces of Rizal, Benguet, Eastern Samar, Zamboanga del Norte, Misamis Oriental, etc., or if we count the number of replicas and parishes of the Black Nazarene in Cavite City, Cagayan de Oro City, Bohol, Pangasinan, Camarines Sur, Masbate, should we count as well the number of parishioners who are devotees of the Santo Nino or the Black Nazarene in those curacies? This quantification is next to impossible, the data being unavailable or may be increasing by leaps and bounds as the years pass by.

Citing the Dominican Fr. Fidel Villarroel, the authors state that “the biggest is that of, ironically, the diminutive Santo Niño, either the original icon in Cebu or its various replications in the Visayas and elsewhere, notably in Pandacan and Tondo in Manila.” They further declare: “Tondo’s Fiesta de Santo Niño even rivals in pomp and pageantry that of Quiapo’s. Incidentally, both feasts are celebrated on the same month.” Well and good. And we may add that both icons were brought to the Philippines by Augustinian and Augustinian Recollect missionary confreres who followed the same Rule of Saint Augustine of Hippo and who up to now share the same Augustinian ideals and spirituality: the first group, the Calced Augustinians came in 1565 and the second group, the Discalced or Recollect Augustinians, in 1606.

Historians are at odds as to when the image of the Black Nazarene arrived in the country. But they agree that the original icon did not arrive with the first “barcada” or boatload of original Augustinian Recollect missionaries in 1606, as virtually claimed by the “quadricentenary” celebration in 2006.

It is noteworthy that “Fernando Nakpil Zialcita of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Ateneo—himself a Quiapense—said he had

yet to see documents relating to the exact date of arrival of the Black Nazarene. Augusto de Viana of the Department of History of the University of Santo Tomas noted the ‘conflict in the documents’ regarding the arrival of the image.”

The Morallo-Zulueta *Philippine Daily Inquirer* article claims that “even the account of the first mission of the Augustinian Recollects to the country bore no record of any black image resembling the *Señor*. The account was written by Fray San Jeronimo (1593-1610), one of the 10 priests and four brothers of the inaugural Recollect mission.” This is a huge blunder and bereft of truth to affirm that Fray Juan de San Jerónimo, superior of the first Recollect mission to the Philippines, authored an account of the inaugural missionary expedition. The superior never wrote any chronicle at all.

We only have two contemporary accounts. As we wrote earlier, the first accounts were authored by Fr. Andrés del Espíritu Santo (1585-1658) and Fr. Rodrigo de San Miguel (1584-1625). A probable source, attributed by Morallo-Zulueta to Fr. Andrés del Espíritu Santo, is the first volume of *Historia general de los Religiosos Descalzos del Orden de los Ermitaños del gran Padre y Doctor de la Iglesia S. Agustín de la Congregación de España y de las Indias* [General history of the Discalced Religious of the Order of the Hermits of the great Father and Doctor of the Church Saint Augustine of the Congregation of Spain and the Indies], written by the first Recollect chronicler and native of Colombia in South America, Fr. Andrés de San Nicolás (1617-1666).

Fr. Andrés de San Nicolás wrote that a May 1, 1605 royal decree from King Philip IV of Spain gave clearance to the Recollects to go to the Philippines. They left Cadiz on July 12, 1605, and arrived in San Juan de Ulua in Mexico on Sept. 17, 1605 to recharge. On Feb. 22, 1606, on board the ship “Espirito [*sic*] Santo,” they left Acapulco to sail for the Philippines.

Storms, challenges

The two authored further attributed to Fray Andrés de San Nicolás: “In the middle of the Pacific, the ship faced innumerable challenges, including storms, which the Recollect missionaries attributed to lack of faith. The fathers then ordered everyone on the ship to confess and take the Holy Communion. Only then did the Pacific crossing went smoothly and without a chink. It would have been the first miracle attributed to the Black Nazarene, except that there’s no record to show the icon was on board.”

Intense devotion to *Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* in Intramuros

It is true that in the San Nicolás Church of the Recollects in

Intramuros that an intense devotion to the *Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno*, the original Nazareno, was enshrined. But Morallo and Zulueta, unfortunately, added that “the fierce devotion was even called a superstitious cult by Fr. Pedro Herce, a 20th-century Recollect historian.” His oft-quoted article is *The Recollects in the Philippines*, in *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas* 435 (1965) 210-253. In page 223, he said that a “cult” is given to the Black Nazarene but the Inquirer article writers inaccurately attributed to Fr. Herce the superstitious cult to *Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno*.

The Spanish Recollect friar-historian simply translated *culto* as cult, and Morallo-Zulueta worsened the translation by declaring it was a “superstitious cult.” The *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* defines *culto* as *homenaje externo de respeto y amor que el cristiano tributa a Dios, a la Virgen, a los ángeles, a los santos y a los beatos* [External homage of respect and love that the Christian pays to God, to the Virgin, to the angels, to the saints and the blessed]. This Spanish definition has obviously nothing to do with the Filipino *matinding debosyon o pagsunod sa isang tao, ideya o bagay* (*UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino* 2010).. The most appropriate meanings for Herce’s cult are *formal religious veneration* (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus* 2014) and *devotion to a person or thing* (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1995). The term *superstitious* inexplicably added by Morallo-Zulueta to Herce’s *cult* is a complete blunder, totally out of the question because Merriam-Webster tells us that *superstition* refers to *beliefs or practices resulting from the ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance*.

Descalzos not Descalzados

Morallo-Zulueta continues: “But to be sure, they prayed to the same Jesus Christ, who apparently granted their wish: for finally on May 10, 1606, the Augustinian *descalzados* safely set foot on Cebu.” Evidently, without consulting any Spanish dictionary at all and thus inventing the past participle of the verb *descalzar*, Morallo and Zulueta coined the word *descalzados* to refer to the *Agustinos Descalzos*, *Discalced Augustinian*, indistinctly as Augustinian Recollects or Recollects. However, the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* categorically says that *descalzo* is the irregular past participle, definitely not *descalzado*. Yes, that the past participle of *calzar* is *calzado* is correct. Hence, the friars of the Order of Saint Augustine, out of which Order the Discalced Augustinians or Augustinian Recollects originated in the 1588 provincial chapter of the Augustinian Province of Castile, Spain, are *Agustinos Calzados*, differentiating them from *Agustinos Descalzos*. The Augustinians of this revered Order of Saint Augustine which originated from

the Great Union of 1256 are called indistinctly *Agustinos Calzados*, Calced Augustinians or Augustinians mostly by Recollect chroniclers and historians.

Icon made in Mexico

Conjectures and probabilities abound in the last paragraphs as the two *Inquirer* duo concede: “Regarding the exact date of and circumstances surrounding the arrival of *Señor* [Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno], historians could only **surmise**.” Two researchers [ADMU Prof. Fernando Zialcita and UST Prof. Augusto de Viana] then declared that the blackened icon “**probably** came from Mexico, having been carved by an Aztec artist who supposedly tinted it dark brown to liken it to the color of his race, mulatto, a hybrid.” Then Zialcita added: “It was **probably** through the Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade that the Nazareno was brought to the country.”. Meanwhile, the *Cofradía de Jesús Nazareno* was first mentioned in the 1650s, according to Zialcita. Zialcita added another probability: “It was **probably** already in the 18th century, around 1760s, when the image of the Black Nazarene was brought down and installed in Quiapo.”

Still another conjecture is given by Morallo and Zulueta: “According to *A Study on Filipino Culture: The Devotion to the Black Nazarene* by M.M. Aguinaldo, the **most probable** date of installation of the Nazareno in Quiapo Church was 1767, when the image was blessed by Archbishop Basilio Sancho.”

Conclusion

Morallo and Zulueta have, admirably, made the following conclusion: “The Black Nazarene has united Filipinos across the centuries. Filipinos have related to the icon so much so that the image has become their own identity and history. And that is no small miracle among several miracles attributed to *El Señor* across the centuries!” Indeed, the Black Nazarene is an enduring legacy of the Augustinian Recollect friars to the Filipino nation, to the Church in the Philippines for all time.