

Time Keeping: Philippine Style

VICTOR L. BADILLO, S.J.

The LEDs in Achie Sarabia's quartz watch flashed 16 September 1978, after flashing 7:30 P.M., as he hastened to an awaited ceremony. It was not the Gregorian calendar reckoning which determined that his family be at the Francisco residence in Amparo Village, Novaliches, for the enactment of the *pamanhikan*, the courting ritual where the man's family formally asks for the maiden's hand in marriage, but the rightness of the aspect of the moon then plainly visible over the Sierra Madre mountains. Among Tayabehnios, and his mother was one, the propitious time for the *pamanhikan* was a day or two before full moon, when it was still waxing.

When to plant? When to fish or set the trap? When to bury the dead or to offer the yearly sacrifice? Long before ICs (integrated circuits) learned to count fleeting bits of duration, long before Galileo was fascinated by a swinging tabernacle lamp, long before winds filled Magellan's sails, pre-Filipinos had found ways of regulating their lives and their activities. What these were may be gleaned from scattered beliefs, songs, tales, and riddles, gathered from sources from the earliest Spanish chroniclers to current folklorists. Little mention will be made of those with obvious western influence. Moreover since we are studying the practices of widely separated peoples, it would be surprising to find one synthetic view and homogeneous development.

These people were less interested in the nature of time than in the measure of time. Just as length is measured by definite intervals of length taken as standards, so a duration of time is measured by intervals of time. Unlike space measures where an adopted unit of length can be used over and over, in measuring time the standard unit exists concurrently and then is lost. So the search has been for "repeating intervals of time," which fortunately astronomy provides in abundance. Sunrise follows sunrise. Full moon follows