

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Heroes, Historians, and the New Propaganda Movement, 1950-1953

Reynaldo C. Ileto

Philippine Studies vol. 58 nos. 1 & 2 (2010): 223–238

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph. or info@philippinestudies.net.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

Research Note

REYNALDO C. ILETO

Heroes, Historians, and the New Propaganda Movement, 1950–1953

The work of John Schumacher, S.J., prompts reflection on the attempt to foment a new Propaganda Movement in the early 1950s. Various individuals and social movements vied for influence or control over the state and nation-building process by connecting their present to the late-nineteenth century. Discourses on heroes and an “unfinished revolution” were deployed to maintain a momentum of change in the wake of the defeat of the communist-led Huk rebellion. Two key actors of this period were Jose Lansang and Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. Lansang, who served as speechwriter of Pres. Elpidio Quirino, rejected armed struggle, sought to instill national pride through the study of history, and evoked a new Propaganda Movement. De la Costa perceived a power vacuum with decolonization and strategized for the Catholic Church to “go to the masses” to prevent a communist success. Lansang’s group and the church would coalesce in supporting Magsaysay for the presidency in 1953.

KEYWORDS: NATIONALISM • COMMUNISM • REVOLUTION • CATHOLIC CHURCH • ELECTIONS • HISTORIANS • HEROES

As a young undergraduate seminarian recently arrived in the Philippines, Fr. John Norbert Schumacher was “anxious to become familiar with Filipino thought, history, and culture.” What he would soon learn, however, would be shaped by the turmoil the country was in following the war years, independence, rapid decolonization, and the spread of a communist-led rebellion. “Political or religious controversy is rarely a conducive context for an introduction to serious history,” Schumacher wrote in 1987, “nonetheless, my own introduction to the study of Philippine history came about as a result of the politico-religious controversy in 1949 over the use of government funds to publish Rafael Palma’s biography of Rizal.” His subsequent study of Rizal life and work, and his adherence to Rizal’s dictum that to shape the future Filipinos must understand their own past, led him to doctoral studies in history culminating in the publication of his thesis in 1973 as *The Propaganda Movement, 1880–1895: The Creators of a Filipino Consciousness, the Makers of Revolution*.

When Schumacher’s book came out I had just successfully defended my own doctoral thesis on “Pasyon and the Interpretation of Change in Tagalog Society.” My entry into the serious study of Philippine revolutionary history came not via a study of Rizal and the *ilustrados* but of Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan. I viewed Schumacher’s work as approaching the revolution “from above,” and mine as an attempt to articulate a Filipino consciousness “from below.” While such dichotomies may be analytically useful, the elements “from above” and “from below” are inextricably bound up in the actual events of the revolution. Father Schumacher and I were trying to understand the same phenomenon to the best of our abilities, given our different social and educational backgrounds.

The Propaganda Movement is a milestone in the literature on the Philippine revolution. As my tribute to its author I offer this preliminary study of a new Propaganda Movement that was formed at about the time Father Schumacher was being introduced to the study (and politics) of Philippine history in the early 1950s. In this essay I trace the origins of a new set of “creators of Philippine consciousness” and “makers of revolution,” whose influence on the youth would steadily grow in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, culminating in what was arguably a new revolution in 1970 dubbed the First Quarter Storm.

One of the “creators of Philippine consciousness” mentioned in this essay is Horacio de la Costa, who was Father Schumacher’s senior in the

Society of Jesus and a future collaborator in historical studies in the 1970s. After independence in 1946, Father de la Costa went to the United States for graduate studies. He obtained a doctorate degree in history at Harvard University in 1951 and then returned to the Philippines in 1953 to teach history at the Ateneo de Manila. Although he would be saddled with many administrative tasks in the 1950s—such as becoming the first Filipino Dean of his college and the editor of the journal *Philippine Studies*—De la Costa made every effort to participate in the heated debates in the 1950s over the shape and course of Philippine history. This essay examines his initial intervention in 1952 as a Catholic voice in the midst of a largely secular-nationalist “New Propaganda Movement.”

The Fall of the Huks and the “Unfinished Revolution”

The Communist Party’s call for a social and political revolution became somewhat of a reality in 1950 when Huk squadrons led by Luis Taruc successfully staged attacks on government installations in at least eight provinces of Luzon. They succeeded in overrunning the provincial capital of Sta. Cruz, Laguna, and their raids in Novaliches brought them to within 25 kilometers of the heart of Manila. Ever conscious of their historic role, they timed their daring raids to coincide with important anniversaries such as the Huks’ founding on 29 March and Bonifacio’s “Cry of Balintawak” on 26 August.

The Communist Party had projected a growth in Huk membership from 10,800 in July 1950 to 172,000 in September 1951. Preparations were underway for the third big raid of the year on 7 November, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1930. The Party’s hopes were dashed, however, by a massive raid on 18 October conducted by the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) on a Party meeting in Manila, leading to the arrests of 105 suspected communists. Ironically, the raid was made possible through the cooperation of a disgruntled Huk commander named Tarciano Rizal, a distant grandnephew of Jose Rizal, who had approached newly appointed Secretary of National Defense, Ramon Magsaysay, in September and provided the crucial information leading to the 18 October raid.

On 21 October, Pres. Elpidio Quirino suspended the writ of habeas corpus claiming the existence of “an actual state of rebellion in many localities” and the “danger that this movement may extend throughout the country.” Instigated by Magsaysay, the proclamation gave the government free reign in detaining persons suspected of being engaged in rebellious or seditious

activities. Among those arrested were nine members of the National Secretariat of the Communist Party. Jose Lava, general secretary, was also captured after he had sought refuge in the houses of various friends, one of them being Teodoro Agoncillo. Information garnered from the huge cache of documents captured at the party hideout was used to identify more personalities allied to the Huk cause. Another round of arrests without warrant soon followed in Manila. A city councilor and five newspapermen, among others, were brought in. Even the home of a counselor of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Renato Constantino, was searched for subversive literature.

The involvement in these events of Agoncillo and Constantino, authors of influential history textbooks in the 1960s and 1970s, is testimony to the Huk movement's importance in the shaping of the nation despite its political setbacks. By "Huk movement" I refer not merely to the Hukbong Mapagpalaya Ng Bayan (HMB) and its Communist Party leadership, but more broadly to the alternative visions of nation building that found expression in the failed revolt and could very well surface in other forms.

The rebellion in the countryside had its urban counterpart in Manila's centers of higher learning, particularly the U.P. and the Lyceum. Agoncillo recalls how in the early 1950s he and his group of academic rebels comprising Leopoldo Yabes, Ricardo Pascual, and Cesar Majul, were "battling the narrow-mindedness of the Catholic group in the U.P. . . . headed by Josefina Constantino (Renato's sister)." The U.P. Catholic Action was squarely in the anticommunist camp and its leader, university chaplain Fr. John Delaney, S.J., would even sit in on lectures to monitor their contents. Yabes and his colleagues stood their ground, and their influence would mount in the course of the 1950s as they published their almost iconoclastic interpretations of the lives and thoughts of Rizal, Bonifacio, and other nationalists of the past.

As the war with Japan and the Huk rebellion faded into the background in the 1950s, national history became an even more crucial site of contestation between differing approaches to the project of making a nation. Even during the trial of the communists captured in the October raid, history was an issue. William Pomeroy and Jesus Lava recount how in May 1951 they heard, over their tiny battery radio, the judge pronouncing sentence on Jose Lava and other comrades in Manila:

The judge's voice comes faintly over the distance, reading a prepared statement. He has not prepared it himself, we know. His voice

is strained and he stumbles a bit, as if he were unfamiliar with the text. He is saying that the Huk revolution is not a true Filipino revolution, that it is not like the revolution of 1896 or like all of the hundred revolts of Filipinos against colonial domination.

The judge goes on to pronounce "that the Huk leaders are not nationalists, that they are agents of a foreign power who are taking advantage of the people and are betraying them into alien hands." This denial to the Huks of any meaningful role in the shaping of the nation, the attribution of foreignness to them, goes in tandem with the denial of their claims to the heritage of the Revolution of 1896 or to the deeper tradition of anticolonial revolt.

President Quirino and the Discourse on Heroes

The beleaguered Quirino, for his part, often appealed to his countrymen's sense of history in seeking their support for his presidency. In an extemporaneous speech on 19 August 1951, for example, he admits "These are really hard times . . . We are still broke." But we dared to be independent because we preferred to "die a free man even in hunger rather than to be a mere colony of the greatest, the wealthiest, and the most powerful nation of the world." That is what we have been fighting for since the very beginning—"Rizal made sacrifice to realize that dream. Del Pilar, yes, he suffered too, and all the rest of our patriots at that time in Spain." We must realize, however, that for all those heroes from Rizal, to the revolutionists, to Quezon and Osmeña, the task was easier than ours today. For they could single-mindedly pursue the goal of political independence while we today are burdened with having to become independent in economic terms. Persuasion, inspiration, and just delivering speeches won't bring about economic independence. Only hard work, patience, tolerance, "and even humiliation and indignity" can achieve that. Our heroes endured that much to bring us independence. Now it is your turn, says Quirino: "If you love your country, my friends, don't pull me down while I am holding [up] one of the rafters there in the middle of this economic or financial storm in the country. Help me; give me your hand, if you really are a patriotic Filipino.

Quirino's ability to casually pull out from the past relevant excerpts from the lives of Rizal and company attests, not just to his erudition, but also to the presence of a shared, public, discourse on heroes that imbues present policies and actions with a sort of transcendental aura. For, after all, the heroes

are revered and, like saints, they are a source of inspiration for daily living or, in this case, the life of the nation. Wartime President Laurel's *Forces that Make a Nation Great* expressed similar sentiments in 1943. In Laurel's time, however, the task at hand was to remove the obstacles, erected by American colonial education, to full communion with the heroes. In 1952 Quirino, in his speech on newly established National Heroes Day, (31 August), no longer speaks of blocked access to heroes. In fact, he remarks, because it really hasn't been that long since the days of the revolution, we "feel so near to our respective heroes."

The problem is that heroes are becoming the objects of partisan veneration—it is to *our respective heroes*, not to the whole pantheon, that we feel close. Our heroes are also disputed figures; "There is a tendency to magnify or discount their stature before our national eyes." Without entering into detail, Quirino alludes to debates in the Legislature that have threatened to demote some heroes from national to regional status; "This makes uncertain if not premature the verdict of history on the appraisal by future generations of the relative significance of our great men."

Quirino then proceeds to establish a proper classification of heroes according to their epochs. First is the "epoch of idealism, of pure inspiration" to which Rizal and his fellow Propagandists, including Father Burgos, belong. This is the period of the "awakening of national consciousness and the crystallization of an idea of freedom." It is followed by the "revolutionary epoch" that saw the "active implementation of our nationalistic independence aims." To this epoch belong Bonifacio, Aguinaldo, Mabini, and others of their generation. The third epoch is the "libertarian" one which Quezon and Osmeña spearheaded. This is when the independence goal was pursued "through democratic processes." And, finally, there is the "present epoch of independence, reconstruction and general economic development." Manuel Roxas launched this epoch, to which belong the heroes of the Japanese and Korean wars, as well as "our heroes in process," the men and women presently engaged in "building a new nation that is free, secure and content."

In Quirino's scheme, the heroes are grouped in a trajectory that leads from Rizal to the nation builders of the present. The emerging controversies of the time surrounding Rizal and Bonifacio, or Bonifacio and Aguinaldo, are muted in this linear scheme—all of these heroes, far from being pitted against each other, have their roles to play in a continuing tradition. The inclusion of Roxas reaffirms the view, contested by the Huks, that indepen-

dence in 1946 was real, a materialization of the idea that Rizal first entertained. Furthermore, by counting among "our heroes and martyrs" Filipinos who served in the Korean War, nation building now firmly carries a Cold War connotation with which it has since been identified. The memorializing of heroes enables the past to animate the present, "to keep intact the authentic spirit of the Filipino race." Concludes Quirino: we cannot begin to speak of our role in the "free world" if this spirit is "drowned out by disunity or by confusion in outlook among our people."

At first glance, one might be tempted to dismiss Quirino's speech as mere Cold War propaganda designed to impose a right-wing, state construction of history upon its citizens. Indeed, this seems to be Quirino's intention. An argument can be made, however, that the allusions to Burgos, Rizal, Bonifacio, Aguinaldo, Mabini—all the heroes of 1896, for that matter—function to disseminate signs that can be apprehended in different ways. Martyrdom, struggle, revolution, independence, and national unity are, after all, potent images in their own right. The possibility of multiple meanings in Quirino's speech becomes more compelling when we look into the actual writers behind the Quirino signature.

Jose Lansang and the New Propaganda Movement

One of President Quirino's speechwriters was Jose Lansang. Lansang was a member of the Philippine Newspaper Guild and once-editor of its official organ, *The Newspaperman*. The guild was a part of the Congress of Labor Organizations, which teamed up with the Democratic Alliance and the Pambansang Kaisahan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM) in opposing U.S. imperialism and the return of the collaborators in 1945–1946. Lansang was one of those nabbed for questioning by the MIS in the October 1950 raids. He complained of having been tortured during interrogation at Camp Murphy, and the issue was just beginning to hit the headlines when the government eased up on him and he was released upon instructions from Defense Secretary Magsaysay.

Lansang's fate was determined not really by Magsaysay but by President Quirino's private secretary, Federico Mangahas, an old friend of Lansang's and a fellow U.P. intellectual. Mangahas helped Lansang start a new life by employing him as a speechwriter and political propagandist. Lansang so impressed Quirino with his grasp of national problems that he was offered a position in Malacañang, which he declined. Nevertheless, one offshoot of

Lansang's connection with Mangahas and Quirino was that he got to write the President's "State of the Nation" address in 1952.

Lansang's hand in composing Quirino's National Heroes Day speech, which we discussed above, seems a foregone conclusion when we examine his views on history and nation building. In an essay published in 1956, Lansang begins by summing up the talk he hears around public pumps in the barrios as well as in Manila cafes and barbershops. There is a lot of disenchantment, a lot of blame heaped on others, but little dispassionate and informed thinking. Worse, society is increasingly being split into groups each looking after its narrow interest or attempting to put down the others. The nation is unable to act in unison at higher levels. Its leaders pale in comparison to Sukarno, Nehru, and U Nu when it comes to self-confidence, the ability to stake out the nation's own path to development, and to mobilize the masses effectively behind it. With independence, notes Lansang, we have seen a gradual fading of the ideals of nationhood, which Rizal and his colleagues worked hard to inculcate in our hearts and minds at the end of the nineteenth century. "Instead of reviving the nationalism which enabled us in 1896 to free ourselves from Spanish tyranny and 'frailocracy' we took the path of mendicancy," meekly letting our erstwhile colonial masters decide our fate.

On top of that, the threat of communism has greatly demoralized us. Despite being independent we are told to surrender our sovereignty over territory to be used for foreign military bases, for otherwise we would be at the mercy of the evil communists. Their enemies have to be ours as well. Even in the realm of religion we are still being told that their priests have greater access to God than local pastors. The list goes on. Always we seem to go along with them, lacking the self-confidence to make up our own minds and to enforce our will.

But has it always been like this with Filipinos? "If it has been," writes Lansang, "why have they fought the revolution against Spain at all? Why did they fight the Americans when those replaced the Spaniards as the rulers? Why have they worked hard and unceasingly until they won political freedom from the United States? Why did they resist the Japanese invaders during the last war? What is the explanation for the seeming contradiction?"

The first, and most important, of several explanations that Lansang gives for this malaise afflicting Filipinos is "their consistent neglect of the truism that a nation develops self-confidence through an intensive and comprehen-

sive study of its own history." They have much to recall, but are not serious enough in going about it:

How many Filipinos in public life today, for instance, are really well-read in the works of Rizal, Mabini, Plaridel, Bonifacio, Father Burgos, Gregorio Aglipay, T. H. Pardo de Tavera, Epifanio de los Santos, or are familiar with, and therefore get continuous inspiration from the outstanding events in the lives of these great Filipinos? Very few. Where can the feeling of self-confidence, of national pride, then come from?

Lansang sees part of the problem, at least, as stemming from the history curriculum in the schools, which still places American and Philippine history on equal footing. There is still a tendency to view our present through the prism of U.S. history, leading to ludicrous expectations that the American experience of economic growth can be duplicated here. Nehru and Sukarno long ago disabused themselves of this.

Lansang goes on to identify other areas where lack of information and knowledge among Filipinos about the nature of global and local problems, leads to dependence on others for crucial decisions. Given that the populace at large has rejected communism and colonialism, our best recourse is to exploit to the hilt a feature of our existing democratic institutions, "the secret polling of the Australian ballot system," to place in the seats of "governmental power" an "intellectual oligarchy whose interests are not rooted in landed property, who have the unselfishness and yet the political skill to steer the nation through the period of change." Lansang admits that his prescription sounds "undemocratic and perhaps Utopian" but he is fully aware of the precedent in Philippine history for this: the rise of a nationalist ilustrado elite in the second half of the nineteenth century. What Lansang seems to be calling for is, in effect, a new Propaganda Movement for the 1950s.

Lansang's stint as Quirino's speechwriter epitomizes the growing involvement of progressive intellectuals in nation-building efforts at the highest level. While writing under the President's signature has conventionally been regarded as a sellout to the state, this phenomenon must be examined in the specific circumstances under which it took place. The theoretical divide between state and civil society does not hold at all times and in all places. When Quirino took in Mangahas as his private secretary, an opening was created in which Quirino's fellow U.P. alumni might gain some influence in

the shaping of the nation-state. Mangahas brought in Lansang, as we have seen. Sometime in 1952, he also launched the *Diliman Star*—named after the district in which the main U.P. campus is located—which was envisioned as a forum for writers and intellectuals to contribute their talents to the bolstering of the Quirino government.

Mangahas recruited academics and students from the U.P. to staff the *Star* and got Lansang to run it. Among the professors who wrote for this magazine were Leopoldo Yabes, Gabriel Bernardo, Francisco Arcellana, and N.V.M. Gonzales. Among the students recruited were Elmer Ordoñez, Andres Cristobal Cruz, Rony Diaz, and Ruben Santos Cuyugan. The *Diliman Star*'s existence was short-lived but it is striking how many of the abovementioned intellectuals were, or would become, involved in the nation-building efforts of heads of state. Lansang, indeed, seemed to be fomenting a new Propaganda—a movement that, after the pattern of Rizal and his confreres, was bent not on violent revolution but on reforming and democratizing the state. When we look at the names of some of the young intellectuals who were attracted to Lansang's views and regularly gathered at his house for discussions, we recognize some of the figures behind the Marcos signature decades later: Adrian Cristobal, Rafael Salas, and Blas Ople.

The scope of the new propaganda was by no means limited to the state university. On 5 March 1952 the formidable Laurel—elected Senator the previous year—and his associates banded together to form a new institution of higher learning, the Lyceum of the Philippines. Laurel was President of this school until his death in 1959. According to his cousin Sotero, who succeeded him as President, Jose Laurel envisioned the Lyceum as a great Filipino school that would be responsive to the requirements and aspirations of his people. From its inception, the institution was committed to “the principle of enlightened and militant nationalism” which Laurel was intent upon disseminating to the youth.

Laurel's philosophy of education was manifestly Rizalian in spirit. In a speech on Rizal's death anniversary in 1952, Laurel makes characters from Rizal's novels voice criticism against those in the seat of power who have “failed to give their people a good, honest and satisfactory government,” as well as against the Huks and communists who “have believed that what crime and iniquity has brought about violence can purify and redeem.” No, says Rizal/Laurel, “if our country has ever to be free, it will not be through vice and crime, it will not be so by corrupting its sons, deceiving some and bribing

others, no! Redemption presupposes virtue, virtue sacrifice, and sacrifice love!” Laurel reiterates the message of *Forces that Make a Nation Great*: by contemplating Rizal's life and works, by “reinfusing ourselves with his incorruptible love of country and people,” we may regain “self-confidence and direction.”

If Rizal were alive today, says Laurel, his love of country would move him to make a “deep and thorough study” of the social and economic problems of the nation, and to work for their solutions “mainly through self-help efforts.” Rizal would not have waited for a Bell Mission or for foreign technical experts to “diagnose the ailments of our country and to prescribe the necessary remedies.” He would have been thoroughly ashamed seeing the depths of mendicancy to which his already-independent Filipinas had sunk. To remedy this, Rizal's educational philosophy would be put into practice in the Lyceum of the Philippines.

Horacio de la Costa, S.J., and Revolutionary Change

Rizal may have been the leading light of the original Propaganda Movement, but he himself was not the product of a secular school. He had studied under the Dominicans and the Jesuits, and in the 1950s the descendants of his teachers were not about to surrender their Rizal to the national visions of a Lansang or even a Laurel. Rizal's nation was, after all, built upon a largely Roman Catholic community that had come into being with the Spanish conquest and conversion in the seventeenth century. Parochial schools and Catholic-run universities were still responsible for the citizen-formation of a sizable portion of the populace. How “Rizal” stood in relation to Catholicism and the nation-state became a matter of heated public debate in 1956 when Laurel sponsored controversial Senate Bill 438 making Rizal's unexpurgated novels required reading in all schools. In a sense, it boiled down once more to the question of history and nation building.

The Catholic position was articulated eloquently by the Jesuit historian, Horacio de la Costa, who had just returned to the Philippines after obtaining his Ph.D. in History from Harvard University in 1951. In his essay “Riding the Whirlwind,” published in June 1952, De la Costa's overriding message echoes what we have seen thus far: “You, too, cannot stop a social revolution. You may as well try to block a whirlwind.” But there are crucial differences in his standpoint and perspective.

For De la Costa, the revolutionary situation is brought about by the withdrawal of the West from much of Asia in the wake of the Second World

War. The Europeans who had come to make their fortunes in Asia had nevertheless brought with them a “spiritual baggage” that contained material of a “highly explosive nature”: modern science, technology, the rule of law, democratic principles, and also—lest we forget—“Christianity, with its emphasis on the human person, his rights and freedoms, valid even against the state.”

De la Costa subscribes to the conventional reading of Southeast Asian history at the time: colonialism altered the status of native rulers, transformed the economy from the subsistence to the export type, developed “an industrial proletariat of landless laborers, and intellectual proletariat of colonial subordinates.” Now that the European colonizers have left or been ejected, a power vacuum has been created “to fill which a bitter struggle is in progress in almost every country of Asia.” Whoever fills this vacuum “rides the whirlwind and becomes master of Asia.”

Of deepest concern to De la Costa, and no doubt to his fellow prelates, is that the communists have set their targets on filling this vacuum, and have been gaining ground. Their success thus far owes much to their efforts “to identify themselves with the masses of Asia because they know that the masses in movement are irresistible.” Their leaders are able to fill the power vacuum, while their “militant faith” fills the spiritual vacuum. Liberals, on the other hand, are incapable of providing an effective counterforce because they have rejected the “ancient faith,” Christianity, which once was the bedrock of liberalism’s high principles.

“It is useless, besides being unjust, to try to stop social change in Asia. That is not the issue. The issue is who is to control that change? Who is to direct it? Our efforts to take control, says De la Costa, stands a good chance of success if we hook it onto the revolution that Rizal started. He reminds the reader that the Asian revolution was already happening before the communists arrived to coopt it. Rizal and Sun Yat-sen had raised the standard of revolution years before the communists did.

To take charge of the inevitable revolution, De la Costa urges, “we must go to the masses, as the communists have gone to the masses.” We must make clear to them, by actions and not just words, that our revolutionary projects are animated by a faith that is “all the more human because it is of Divine origin,” and that belongs to Asia as much as to Europe. In effect, De la Costa subscribes to the notion of “unfinished revolution” or even a “revolt of the masses” (without mentioning Bonifacio, perhaps because the latter had pun-

ished captured friars) as long as Christianity animates the process. Fomenting such a revolt would, in theory, not be half as difficult for the Catholic Church as it was for the Communist Party, for its religious cadres were already in place in all the parish churches and missions throughout the islands.

One nagging problem about the “use” of Rizal in social campaigns of the church was that the national hero had been inducted into Masonry and in this capacity attacked the excesses of the religious orders. As a matter of fact, the Propaganda Movement and the revolution of 1896 were to a great extent the handiwork of Masonic lodges. The church, however, always claimed—with relevant documentation—that Rizal returned to the Catholic fold, or “retracted,” just before his execution. In 1950, Atty. Juan Nabong published a pamphlet casting doubt on Rizal’s retraction of Masonry. This was followed by the publication in June 1950 of a booklet by Judge Leonardo Garduño questioning the authenticity of the retraction documents produced by the church. Counterattacks by church loyalists followed, of course. The concern over, not just Rizal’s contamination by Masonry, but more importantly the perceived influence of Masons in the projects of the nation-state, forms the backdrop for the first major church battle against the state.

The Catholic Church and the New Propaganda

In its editorial of 27 January 1953 the Catholic newspaper *Sentinel* loudly called the attention of President Quirino to the Masonic affiliations of his Undersecretary of Education Benito Pangilinan and two other ranking members of the Department of Education. In alleged violation of the Constitution, said the *Sentinel*, these three participated in a special committee “to eliminate religious instruction in public schools.” In a subsequent radio broadcast, Raul Manglapus, Secretary of the Citizens Party and a distinguished graduate, with Father De la Costa, of the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila, urged Quirino to do something about this “regrettable situation.” The exposé, he said, “shows how the will of the people is being frustrated by a handful of men who are sworn to frustrate it . . . who are so strategically placed within the machinery of the government . . . mocking the will of millions and molding the minds of millions of our youth.”

At the heart of the controversy were not really the Masons in the cabinet but the report of the special committee suggesting that the Quirino government was dragging its feet in implementing the constitutional provision on optional religious instruction in public schools. The church’s lay activists organized in

Catholic Action groups led by Ateneo alumnus and future Senator, Francisco Rodrigo, interpreted the Imperial Report as “unfair” to the honor and prestige of the “Catholic Philippines.” The use of the latter term suggests that they considered Roman Catholicism as an integral part of the nation’s edifice. The teaching of religion, therefore, should not necessarily be pushed aside by the teaching of national history and civics.

Quirino’s defense of Undersecretary Pangilinan did not help to ease the tensions between church and government. While the Catholic Action groups were able in the end to secure a better deal from the president regarding the teaching of religion, the issue continued to simmer, eventually hurting Quirino’s chances in the November presidential elections. In church pulpits across the land, Catholic priests began to hammer away at corruption in the government. As the elections approached, the church hierarchy emphatically exhorted the congregation to vote for “men of unquestioned integrity and to reject those who had been involved in dishonesty and corruption in public office.” Jaro Archbishop Jose Ma. Cuenco (brother of Nacionalista senatorial candidate Mariano Cuenco) called on his flock in the rural areas to “use the right of suffrage . . . as a powerful weapon against inefficient and dishonest officials.” Lingayen Bishop Mariano Madriaga, although an Ilocano like Quirino, did not hide his election preferences when he criticized those candidates who had “trampled [upon] the sacred rights of the people.” Bishop Madriaga had attempted, unsuccessfully, to influence Quirino on the issue of religious instruction, and now Quirino was paying the price for his backing of the Mason, Pangilinan.

The Catholic Church’s mounting attacks on corruption in the Quirino government were signs that its leaders had identified someone with “moral integrity,” as Dean Jose Hernandez put it, someone more “spiritually fitted” than Quirino to lead the country: former Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay. In this way would Father de la Costa’s call to fill the “power vacuum” with men of integrity and faith be heeded.

Ironically, Laurel and Lansang, for reasons different from the church’s, had also come to the conclusion in early 1953 that Magsaysay was the man to back in the coming elections. Catholic Action and the new Propaganda Movement would thus, unexpectedly, become allies in the mass campaign to elect Magsaysay as president.

Laurel would introduce the new Nacionalista Party front-runner as the Andres Bonifacio of the times, while Raul Manglapus and his Ateneo boys

would jazz up the campaign with tunes of Magsaysay Mambo. Things would not always remain cheery and upbeat, however. Magsaysay’s victory would in fact mark the beginning of a kind of history war highlighted by the Rizal Bill controversy, the uproar over Agoncillo’s *Revolt of the Masses*, Majul’s writings on Mabini and the Revolution, Constantino’s critique of the veneration of Rizal, De la Costa’s *Trial of Rizal*, and so many more writings on heroes and revolution over the next two decades. Fr. John Schumacher’s essays in the late 1960s, culminating in his 1973 book on the Propaganda Movement are, in fact, part of a new Propaganda Movement, a repetition of the past that sees the historian reenacting in his time the very events he has reconstructed.

Sources

- Abueva, Jose V. 1971. *Magsaysay: A political biography*. Manila: Solidaridad.
- Acosta, Carmencita H. 1973. *The life of Rufino Cardinal Santos*. Quezon City: Kayumanggi Press.
- Agpalo, Remigio. 1992. *Jose P. Laurel, national leader and political philosopher*. Manila: J. P. Laurel Memorial Corp.
- Bolasco, Mario V. 1994. *Points of departure: Essays on Christianity, power and social change*. Manila: St. Scholastica’s College.
- Coquia, Jorge R. 1955. *The Philippine presidential election of 1953*. Manila: University Publishing Co.
- Costa, Horacio de la, S.J. 1965. *The background of nationalism, and other essays*. Manila: Solidaridad.
- Dalisay, Jose Y. 1999. *The Lavas: A Filipino family*. Manila: Anvil Publishing.
- Garcia, Ricardo P. 1964. *The great debate: Rizal’s retraction*. Foreword by Senator Jose W. Diokno. Quezon City: R. P. Garcia.
- Ileto, Reynaldo C. 1998. *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, discourse and historiography*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- . 2004. The “unfinished revolution” of 1943? Rethinking Japanese occupation and postwar nation-building in the Philippines. AGLOS Working Papers Series 1. Tokyo: Sophia University.
- Lansang, Jose P. 1956. The well and the booth. *Comment: A Quarterly Devoted to Philippine Affairs* (Manila), Oct.
- Laurel, Jose P. 1944. *Forces that make a nation great* [1943]. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- National Intelligence Coordinating Agency. 1964. The communist education and propaganda effort in the Philippines. Typescript. Manila.
- Ocampo, Ambeth R. 1995. *Talking history: Conversations with Teodoro Andar Agoncillo*. Manila: De La Salle University Press.
- Quirino, Elpidio. 1953. *Quirino: Selected speeches*. Manila: Orient Publishing.
- . 1955. *The Quirino way: Collection of speeches and addresses*. Manila, *Rizal Centennial Bulletin*. 1955–1961. Manila.

Saulo, Alfredo B. 1969. *Communism in the Philippines*. Foreword by Horacio de la Costa, S.J. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Schumacher, John N., S.J. 1987. History and the nation. *Solidarity* 112 (May–June): 142–47.

———. 1973. *The propaganda movement: 1880–1895. The creators of a Filipino consciousness, the makers of the revolution*. Manila: Solidaridad.

Taruc, Luis. 1953. *Born of the people* [1949]. New York: International Publishers.

Reynaldo C. Ileto is professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. He has taught at the University of the Philippines, James Cook University, and the Australian National University, where he maintains an affiliation. He has held the Tañada Chair at De La Salle University, the Burns Chair in History at the University of Hawaii, and senior fellowships at Kyoto University and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He is the author of *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (1979) and *Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (1998). He has received the Benda Prize, the Ohira Prize, the Philippine National Book Award, and the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize. <seairc@nus.edu.sg>