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Mahajani: Philippine Nationalism

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Book Reviews

PHILIPPINE NATIONALISM: A TOTAL VIEW

PHILIPPINE NATIONALISM: EXTERNAL CHALLENGE AND FILIPINO RESPONSE, 1565-1946. By Usha Mahajani. University of Queensland Press. St. Lucia, Queensland. 1971. Pp. xvi, 530.

The author of this 530-page treatise on Philippine nationalism (published in Australia) is an Indian scholar who holds a doctorate from the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Her earlier studies had been made at the Rajputana University in India and at Smith College in Massachusetts. Her study of "Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya" (published in Bombay in 1960) has made her sensitive to nationalist movements elsewhere in Asia. Intrigued by the unique character of the Filipino response to American aid in recent years (of which she says that "the character of the criticism is more significant than the criticism itself"), she has decided to study the development of Philippine nationalism "in its historical totality": from 1565 when the Islands became a Spanish colony, until 1946 when they achieved independence from the United States.

Miss Mahajani says that "until recently" it has been "generally held" that Filipinos did not really achieve their independence in the same way that other Asian countries have achieved theirs: where (she says) nationalism was "forged out of intense independence struggles, sanctified by imprisonment and martyrdom of leaders." Instead, "for many years a notion prevailed that the Philippines became free the easy way", with independence given by America on a silver platter.

It is to correct such a notion that Miss Mahajani is at pains to describe the various Philippine abortive revolts against Spain notably that of Diego Silang at the time of the British Occupation. Her treatment of the Propaganda Movement and of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 is rather sketchy, but she treats at greater length the colonial

period under America and the Japanese Occupation. In general the attitude is sympathetic and the treatment objective. A book of such wide scope and perceptive insights should help to put the events of Philippine history in broader perspective.

Unfortunately this book of such obvious merits is marred by carelessness of historical fact and orthographic detail. Villalobos, who gave the name "Philippine" to these Islands, is consistently spelled "Villabose"; Andres Bonifacio is called Andre; Gregorio Araneta is named Gregori; not to mention such obvious misprints as Lingayon; Carrte (for Cavite); Laoisa (for Loaisa); and so on.

More important than correct spelling is historical accuracy. The newspaper *La Solidaridad*, mouthpiece of Filipino nationalism, was not "published by a few residents of Manila"; it was published by Filipino exiles in Barcelona and Madrid. Father Jose Burgos is described as "a creole: i.e. a Spaniard born in Manila": he was neither creole nor Spaniard nor was he born in Manila. Regarding Taft's attempt to purchase the friar lands, we are told that "Taft became tired of the Vatican's tactics of holding the price of the land as high as possible". The Vatican did no such thing: what the Vatican told Taft was that he must negotiate with the owners of the land, and those were in Manila.

And so on. There are numberless historical inaccuracies. We are told that "Filipinos organized the Gran Oriente Español"; that Luis Varela was "a Filipino thinker"; and so on. Individually, most of these errors are not of great moment in themselves. But collectively, they produce a very bad impression of seriously faulty scholarship.

The real trouble is (as the author admits with candor) that, not knowing Spanish, she has had to depend on secondary sources, which, in some cases, were not always the most reliable. In this connection we find it hard to agree with the author's claim that an inability to read Spanish (which "barred access to literature in Spanish or the Spanish period of Philippine history") "need not be a hurdle" in the understanding of Philippine nationalism. To write a history of the Philippines from the 16th to the 19th century without knowing Spanish is almost as difficult as to write Roman history without being able to read Latin.

This reviewer is gratified to see, however, that the book of which he is the co-author has been cited by Miss Mahajani at least 26 times. But apparently it was only the first volume (1960) of our *Religious Revolution in the Philippines* to which she had access. The second volume (1966) might have helped to correct some of the misleading impressions that she seems to have obtained from some of her interviews in Manila. And the third volume (1971) would have put at

her disposal more than 250 documents, all of them dealing with her precise subject: Philippine nationalism.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

POETRY, PERCEPTION AND METAPHOR

A POEM OF THE NEW CREATION. By Peter Milward S.J. The Hokuseido Press. Tokyo. 1970. Pp. 73.

Peter Milward is a very competent critic whose works have already been reviewed in the pages of *Philippine Studies*. From his professorial chair at Sophia University have issued two of the best commentaries on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, one on T. S. Eliot's *Quartets*, an anthology of Chesterton's essays and remarks on Shakespeare, and several books dealing with English literary history. In the book under review Father Milward puts aside criticism and literary history to don the cap of the poet. His subject is as grand and as profound as could be imagined. As the title suggests, it is about "the new creation": namely, the supernatural destiny which God has given to man; man's fall from that destiny through sin; man's redemption by Christ; the new supernatural life which that redemption brought to man, whereby man becomes a living image of God and a partaker in His divine life.

It is in fact the subject that Milton himself had attempted to treat in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Milton of course was the much greater poet, but he was an uninstructed theologian. If Milton had the theological learning — and the theological panoramic viewpoint — that Peter Milward has, *Paradise Lost* and its sequel might both have become far greater poems than they actually are.

Milward is a far better theologian than Milton: but it is not degrading to anyone to be informed that he is not as great a poet as Milton. Nor is Milward as good a poet as his great English fellow Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins. The difference lies in the ability to embody an abstract perception in a concrete and brilliantly perceived deeply felt metaphor.

Yet Milward's poetic essay is full of insights. Paraphrasing T.S. Eliot's "Teach us to care and not to care, teach us to sit still", Milward says, in lines reminiscent of the *Quartets*:

Prayer ascends from earth to heaven
Rising from restlessness to rest
Moving from dissipation to pure action