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Father De La Costa on Nationalism and Literature: The Background of Nationalism and Other Essays

Review Article: Miguel A. Bernad

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fic. Power was, after all, what counted in the calculus of those who controlled events in Japan. In the last analysis, the choice of war or peace cannot be taken away from the would-be aggressor. It is always possible, as Grew pointed out, for a state to commit "what might well amount to national 'hara kiri' in a mistaken conception of patriotism" (116). For this reason, Grew always maintained that the tactful conduct of day-to-day diplomacy be supported by military preparedness:

Theodore Roosevelt enunciated the policy "Speak softly but carry a big stick." If our diplomacy in the Far East is to achieve favorable results, and if we are to reduce the risk of an eventual war with Japan to a minimum, that is the only way to proceed. Such a war may be unthinkable, and so it is, but the spectre of it is always present and will be present for some time to come. It would be criminally short-sighted to discard it from our calculations....again, and yet again, I urge that our own country be adequately prepared to meet all eventualities in the Far East (117).

At about the same time that Grew was thus memorializing Washington, Stanley Hornback was outlining to the Secretary of State his views regarding the American posture in the Far East:

That which should be the policy of the United States with regard to the Far East can readily be summed up in one sentence: a) to act with justice and with sympathy, as a 'good neighbor'... b) to speak softly; and c) to carry a big stick (117).

In pursuing the 'good neighbor policy,' however, the administration apparently gave little thought to the possibility that Japan might in time refuse to tolerate the United States as a neighbor. Throughout the mid-1930's, the United States spoke softly. But because she failed to provide herself with the big stick, her words failed to carry very much weight. It should be a source of comfort to the victims of American unpreparedness in World War II that in today's current crises, the American desire for peace does not impair her readiness for war.

EDILBERTO DE JESUS, JR.

FATHER DE LA COSTA ON NATIONALISM AND LITERATURE

THE BACKGROUND OF NATIONALISM AND OTHER ESSAYS.

By Horacio de la Costa S.J., Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1965. x, 89 pp.

The new publishing house and bookshop on Padre Faura Street, owned and managed by Mr. and Mrs. Francisco Sionil Jose, is named after the well-known patriotic newspaper for which Rizal and the Filipino patriots in Spain wrote their essays. To judge from its

publications, the new bookshop is well named. In its first year of existence it has launched a new Quarterly (entitled "Solidarity") and has published three books, of which the first two are concerned with Philippine culture and the nationalistic spirit.

The first of these books was by Carlos P. Romulo. The second, by Father de la Costa.

Father de la Costa, of course, needs no introduction to the readers of *Philippine Studies*, of which he was Editor from 1959 to 1964. The present volume is a collection of fourteen essays on various topics, including three essays on Rizal, two on Religion, several on Philippine history and culture, and one on the martyred priests, Fathers Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora.

The profoundest essay in the book is that which has given its title to the entire volume: "The Background of Nationalism". It is a remarkable essay in the history of an idea, following a different approach from that used by other writers who have dealt with the same subject. For instance, Barbara Ward's approach is chiefly sociological; Father de la Costa's is mainly philosophical. He begins by making a distinction between Nationalism as a sentiment (or a virtue) and Nationalism as a doctrine. The first is a form of patriotism; the second is a philosophy, or based on one. The history of this latter type of Nationalism is traced by Father de la Costa from its etymological derivations, through the works of Shakespeare and Burke, to the concept of the Noble Savage and Rousseau's idea of the Social Contract; thence to the French Revolution and the concept of national sovereignty, to the German mystical concept of the Nation, and finally to the modern apotheosis of Nationalism as a quasi-religion. In the course of this historical survey, there are some brilliant insights. For instance, "Our *barangay* was almost exactly what the Romans meant by *natio*." Or again: "Thus, by a curious irony, what began with Rousseau as an appeal to freedom issued with Napoleon as an appeal to power."

That essay on Nationalism is well worth reading, as is also the last essay in the book on "The Responsibility of the Writer in Contemporary Philippine Society." In that essay Father de la Costa voices a lament which many others have felt. Contemporary Philippine literature, he says, is "too contemporary" and exhibits "an almost total lack of the historical perspective."

Perhaps this historical perspective is not as totally absent from contemporary Philippine literature as Father de la Costa seems to think. Not a few of the novels published in recent years exhibit a very strong historical sense. To mention four: "The Pretenders" by F.

Sionil Jose; "The Hand of the Enemy" by Kerima Polotan; "The Woman with Two Navels" by Nick Joaquin; "The Peninsulars" by Linda Casper.

However, Father de la Costa's point is valid: "Here in the Philippines, the very riches of our social experience, the diversity of our cultural traditions, creates a problem of synthesis. The synthesis can be achieved, but only if our writers will enlarge our consciousness and refine our sensibility so as to embrace not only our present but all our past."

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

A MOSAIC OF PHILIPPINE HISTORY

READINGS IN PHILIPPINE HISTORY: Selected historical texts presented with a commentary by H. de la Costa, S.J. Manila: Bookmark, 1965. 351 pp.

Father Horacio de la Costa's scholarly papers on certain aspects of Philippine history read before national and international conferences, his deep and penetrating studies published in local and foreign learned journals, and his monumental work, *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768* (Harvard University Press, 1961), have greatly enhanced his reputation as an eminent Philippine historian.

Now he has come up with this present work which "consists of selections from a wide variety of documents, most of them primary sources, many of them hitherto unpublished... written by men close to the events they describe: often by eyewitnesses; frequently by active participants." Father de la Costa appends explanatory notes wherever necessary, and has woven the selections into a continuous narrative by means of a running commentary.

Divided into twenty-seven chapters, the book documents early Philippines, Spanish conquest and colonization, British occupation, Philippine revolution, American regime, and second world war and contemporary Philippines. Father de la Costa's gift of synthesis is very apparent here. He has presented what may be called a "mosaic" of our history, each selection a neat little piece forming that mosaic. Happily, the mosaic is so broad as to suggest a well-conceived and well-executed mural encompassing, as it does, the whole range of our history.

One may, therefore, understand the gigantic task of sifting material from the tremendous mass of documents, manuscripts, books,