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The Dominicans, by Villaroel

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The Dominicans and the Philippine Revolution, 1896–1903. By Fidel Villaroel, O.P. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 1999. lv + 452 pages, plates.

Fr. Villaroel's recent edition of hitherto unknown documents on the Dominican role during the Philippine revolution of 1896–1901 is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the subject. It is a collection of unknown—and purposely (?) overlooked—sources from the Dominican Archives that, properly interpreted, balances an extremely nationalist and, of course, simplistic and erroneous, understanding of a central event in Philippine history. With these documents we can now clarify a number of suppositions that have never been challenged and accepted at face value.

An introduction summarizing the activities—mainly epistolary—during the years of the revolution, is followed by seven chapters of documents grouped according to their theme. For easier reading, each chapter opens with brief notes summarizing the documents themselves, but, of course, the documents can stand by themselves.

The more important parts of the book are the pages that briefly point to the causes or instigators of the revolution (xxxii–xxxiv), and the long chapters 2 and 3, which study the question in full detail. Chapter 2 (pp. 36–166) includes three “expositions” (“statement” would perhaps be a better translation): the first, submitted to the Queen by the Procurators of the religious Orders; the second, drawn up by the Dominican Prior Provincial in Manila for the Overseas Minister; and the third, signed by the superiors of the five religious orders in the Philippines and presented to the Spanish Overseas Minister. Chapter 3 (pp. 170–244) is a long essay by Fr. Fernando Arias, more or less a repetition of the preceding documents and offering his own analysis of the causes and plotters of the revolution.

The other chapters of the book contain the telegraphic communications with Madrid when the revolution began (Chapter 1), the efforts to free the Spanish friars from captivity (Chapter 4–5), and finally the claims for war indemnity, which apparently were not satisfied.

The documents show more than adequately that the revolution was not anti-Spanish, but anti-friar and anti-Church. Modern developments and political unrest in Spain had spread liberal ideas to the Philippines, where they found ready acceptance among the educated elite. But Philippine society at large was not ready for them, and perceived wrongdoing by representatives of the Church added to the impression among the unschooled that the modernists were correct. Unfortunately, none of the friars lifted a finger or raised their voice in self-defense, but kept silent, confident in their conscience that they were trying to carry out God's work for the sake of the Filipinos. This gave apparent substance to what they called “calumnies,” effectively spread

by an efficient propaganda machine. Unfortunately, propaganda is repetitive, exaggerated, appeals to the emotions, and seldom tells the entire truth. This led to the present perception that the friars were indeed monsters, and the revolution was the only solution to be rid of them.

Significantly, the documents ask why abuses by both Spanish government officials and private citizens were hardly mentioned by the anti-friar propagandists. And that the majority of the simple Filipinos did not share this anti-friar animus is shown by their shocked reaction—some tearful scenes are documented—when their priests and pastors, for whom they continued to show love and respect, were forcibly led away by the Katipuneros. Evidence is available that many surreptitiously aided the friar prisoners and were stopped from their charity only out of fear from the revolutionary leaders. Not only that, when peace returned, several towns asked for their priests to return.

Also important is the correspondence on the release of the captured friars. Aguinaldo refused to release them because of what he claimed were international legal provisions that enemies might be justly taken. The friars appealed to the same international law, which provided that non-combatants should be spared. Aguinaldo's answer, clearly penned by Mabini—for the former could not have known the legal nuances involved—insisted that the friars were combatants, since they were Spaniards whom the governor general had put under the obligation of fighting the rebellion.

Documentary sources are essential to history, for without them, one writes only fiction. Their translation, therefore, is crucial. Unfortunately, the English translation hobbles in several places, and at times makes no clear sense. Unfortunately, the reader does not have the original text and cannot make the proper evaluation. A bilingual edition would be good, but it would have raised the price of the book. Just one example, on p. 118, the translation reads: "would maintain the silence that has fittingly been our norm of procedure for many years, nor speaking except when questioned officially, *being jealous by that manner retirement, of avoiding criticism.*" Does the phrase mean "careful in our habitual retreat, to avoid criticism"?

At least twice, Fr. Alfeo G. Nudas, S.J. is mentioned as an "historian." He is not.

In a book that presents historical sources, lapses in editorial work and proofreading (quite a number) are crucial and should be avoided.

Fr. Villaroel deserves our congratulations for a painstaking work. From now on, studies on the Philippine revolution must take account of this book.

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