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Rizal on Divine Providence and Nationhood

RAUL J. BONOAN

This paper forms part of the larger, if somewhat ambitious, endeavor to construct a theology rooted in Scripture and Catholic Tradition and at once distinctively Filipino, from the sources of the Filipino spirit and our national traditions. The writings of Dr. José Rizal are truly a rich source of the Filipino spirit which he always strove to discover, interpret, and articulate with force, clarity, and conviction. Rizal himself suggested that the national spirit be preserved in written sources and that posterity go back from time to time to these sacred repositories of our national tradition. In a letter to an elderly Filipino priest, Father Vicente García, who had written a courageous defense of the *Noli me tângere* against the attacks of Fray José Rodríguez, Rizal urged him to keep on writing and recording his thoughts for future generations of Filipinos.

In the titanic task of our common regeneration, without ceasing to march forward, once in a while we look back to our elders, searching their faces for some sign of judgment on what we have done. In our thirst for knowledge of the past, in our thirst for learning, we come to persons like yourself, looking for the key that will open the future for us. Bequeath to us your thoughts and the lessons of your long experience. Write them down in books so that we do not have to study all over again what you studied but will only make capital of your legacy, building on it and adding to it the harvest of our own reaping.¹

Rizal's own written legacy discloses a greatness and brilliance of mind which has won for him a unique and unparalleled place in his country's intellectual history. In one of his essays Father Horacio

1. Rizal-Vicente García, 7 January 1891, *Epistolario Rizalino*, ed. Teodoro Kalaw, 5 vols. (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1930–38), 3:137. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *Ep. Riz.*

de la Costa has aptly ranked him with Confucius and Mahatma Gandhi as a great Asian thinker and teacher of the Asian man.²

It may be asked, however: Is it possible to find something worthwhile for theology in the thought of a man who attacked the Catholic Church so bitterly, ridiculed her ministers so mercilessly, and renounced the fundamental dogmas of the Christian faith for the principles of deist rationalism? It is possible to show that Rizal was in fact in search of a theological framework that would give support, depth, meaning, and life to the cries and aspirations of his people, a theological framework which, in default of Catholic theology, deist rationalism readily supplied. It is my belief that the blame for Rizal's adventure with rationalism must be laid, if only in part, on the impoverishment of nineteenth century Catholic theology and its impotence to respond and give Christian meaning to the new emergent Filipino consciousness, of which Rizal was a foremost creator.

But Rizal's rationalism will bring us too far beyond our present concern. I only wish to mention at this point what the nonbelieving Spanish philosopher and contemporary of Rizal at the Universidad Central de Madrid, Miguel de Unamuno, had already noted as early as 1907, that Rizal's break with Catholicism was never total and complete, that he always harbored an attachment to the religion of his youth.³ There are indications that in his travels abroad he still went to Mass occasionally,⁴ and in Dapitan he wrote his mother that he had resumed in his place of exile the practice of going to Mass every Sunday.⁵ At the same time, many of his religious views remained authentically Christian; he retained many elements of the Catholic faith. One of them is the subject of this paper, namely, his trust in divine providence, of special interest no doubt to the Filipino ideologue, philosopher, or theologian, inasmuch as it is the convergence point of Rizal's religious thought and his political philosophy.

2. Horacio de la Costa, S.J., "The Eastern Face of Christ," in *Asia and the Philippines* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1967), pp. 162-69.

3. Wenceslao E. Retana, *Vida y escritos del Dr. José Rizal* (Madrid: Victoriano Suárez, 1907), pp. 493-95.

4. For the various entries in his diaries in which he recorded his having attended Mass, see *Escritos de José Rizal*, vol. 1: *Diarios y memorias* (Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961), pp. 180, 241, 246.

5. Rizal-Teodora Alonzo, 5 January 1893, *One Hundred Letters of José Rizal to his Parents, Brother, Sisters, Relatives* (Manila: Philippine National Historical Society, 1959), p. 393. Henceforth referred to as *One Hundred Letters*.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF RIZAL'S TRUST IN GOD

By way of prenote, it ought to be mentioned that there was a progression in Rizal's thought in this regard. As early as his student memoirs written in 1878–81, Rizal invoked God's providence several times, in particular, in connection with his mother's imprisonment on the basis of a false charge.⁶ And in his letters home in 1885, when news of his political activities in Madrid plunged his mother into a state of depression, he exhorted her to greater confidence in God.⁷ In these instances the accent was on God's guidance over his own personal life and that of his family. But as personal grievances and the Calamba troubles so merged with the larger sufferings of his people as to make but one lamentable tale of woe, God's providence came to be seen in terms of the hope that must brighten the long hard struggle of his people against their oppressors and the unique role he was destined to play in that struggle. The communal aspect of divine providence was already evident in four letters written to his Austrian friend, Professor Ferdinand Blumentritt, in 1887–89.

From these letters it is possible to trace the basic elements of Rizal's trust in God, which may be enumerated thus: (1) trust in God even in times of trial and adversity, (2) trust in one's own self and native resources, and (3) the use of just and honorable means in the pursuit of national liberation.

First, the Filipinos ought to place their trust in God even and especially in time of injustices and persecutions. Saddened by news of injustices committed against some Filipinos in a Manila cafe, he took consolation in "the thought of a God who sooner or later will avenge us."⁸ Current reverses must not discourage those who struggled, for "if it is impossible to defeat our enemies, one morning will pass and another will appear, for there must be a God of justice, otherwise we would be atheists."⁹

Secondly, such trust in God implied trust in one's own self and one's own God-given resources. Prior to his return to the Philippines in 1887, Blumentritt had offered Rizal to write letters of recommendation in his favor, which he could show officials in the Philip-

6. Rizal, "Memorias de un estudiante de Manila," *Diarios y memorias*, pp. 4, 9–11.

7. Rizal-Paciano [1885], *One Hundred Letters*, p. 214; Rizal-Teodora Alonzo [1885], *ibid.*, p. 223.

8. Rizal-Blumentritt, 12 January 1887, *Ep. Riz.*, 5:56.

9. Rizal-Blumentritt, 31 January 1889, *ibid.*, p. 394.

piners to insure his safety. Rizal politely refused. "Recommendations can be useful in a foreign country, but in the native land of the recommendee they are a bitter thing. The truth is that they will be useful, but I am ashamed to show such letters. I thank you very much and, come what may, I trust in God."¹⁰ To accept such letters, even from a friend and brother such as Blumentritt, would be a betrayal of his integrity, a rejection of his own resources and inner strength, and hence, a lack of faith in the principle that if we but do our part, God will take care of the rest. Indeed, the bitter experience of Spanish intransigence had taught the Filipinos to trust not in the strength and influence of others, but in themselves and in God. Again he wrote Blumentritt: "the majority of the Filipinos have already lost all hope in Spain. Now we await our fate *from God and ourselves*, never anymore from any government."¹¹

Thirdly, an inseparable corollary to such trust was Rizal's uncompromising resolution that the means to be employed must be morally right, noble, and just. "If I have to act villainously to make my country happy, I would refuse to do so because I am sure what is built on sand sooner or later will collapse."¹² Hence, Rizal was extremely cautious and wary about the advocacy of violent revolution. However, if left with no other choice, his people would take up arms with courage. If driven by the Spanish government to revolution, then "I too will take part in this fate of my people."¹³ But the choice of peaceful or violent means rested not on the Filipinos, who were by nature patient, peaceful, and gentle; but on the Spaniards, who must institute the necessary reforms if bloodshed was to be prevented. In any case, *bahala ang May Kapal* (God will provide)!¹⁴

This, in summary, was the meaning of Rizal's trust in providence as seen in his letters to Blumentritt in 1887-89. Subsequent letters and writings would make mention of providence with increasing frequency. Two incidents in the following years, namely,

10. Rizal-Blumentritt, 19 June 1887, *ibid.*, p. 168.

11. Rizal-Blumentritt, 23 June 1888, *ibid.*, p. 260. Italics mine.

12. Rizal-Blumentritt, 31 January 1889, *ibid.*, p. 393.

13. Rizal-Blumentritt, 19 June 1887, *ibid.*, p. 167.

14. This Tagalog expression and its variant, *Ang bahala ay na sa May Kapal*, are to be found in letters wherein Rizal discussed with Blumentritt the etymology of *Bathala* (God). Rizal believed that *Bathala* was etymologically related to *bahala* (caire). See *Ep. Riz.*, vol. 5: Rizal-Blumentritt, 16 March 1887, (p. 84); 29 March 1887 (pp. 103-05); 17 April 1890 (pp. 553-54).

Basa's imprisonment and the fall of Becerra, would bear out the profound implications of Rizal's trust in divine providence.¹⁵

APPEAL TO GOD

On 1 April 1889, the Filipino colony in Barcelona received a cable from Hong Kong asking for assistance on behalf of Matias Basa and two accomplices imprisoned in Manila, allegedly through friar intrigues.¹⁶ The sender was Matías' brother, José Basa, one of the exiles of 1872 and now a wealthy businessman, who directed Propaganda Movement activities in Hong Kong and had been instrumental in smuggling Rizal's *Noli* and other Propaganda literature into the Philippines. As sometimes happens in times of turmoil and heated controversy even in our day, the reports gave the impression, later proven to be false, of mass arrests and a campaign of terror.¹⁷ In fact, there were none arrested aside from the three, who shortly after were released; hence the incident in itself was a trivial one. However, what was of great significance for our subject was Rizal's reaction to the news. But the better to understand the position of Rizal, it will help to consider first the course of action taken by Marcelo del Pilar, then editor of *La Solidaridad*. For with Del Pilar's views Rizal increasingly differed as time went on, regarding the conduct of the propaganda and the struggle for national liberation.

Upon receiving the cable, Del Pilar immediately set about to mobilize his intricate network of contacts among journalists, politicians, and government officials in Spain. On behalf of his periodical, of the association of Filipino reformers in Barcelona, also named "La Solidaridad," and of the rest of the Filipino colony in Barcelona, he sent a telegram to Manuel Becerra, Overseas Minister of Sagasta's Liberal government, asking him to

15. In my treatment of these two events, I have depended heavily on the book of John N. Schumacher, S.J., *The Propaganda Movement: 1880-1895. The Creators of a Filipino Consciousness, the Makers of Revolution* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1973), chapters 8-12 particularly, for its comprehensive, incisive, and balanced analysis of the conflict between Rizal and Del Pilar.

16. The reports of the incident and Del Pilar's moves are to be found in *Epistolario de Marcelo H. del Pilar*, vol. 1 (Manila: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1955) Del Pilar-P. Ikazama [Pedro Serrano Laktaw], 4 April 1889 (pp. 84-86); Del Pilar-Rizal, 8 April 1889 (pp. 86-88); N. Butron [José M. Basa]-Del Pilar, 10 April 1889 (pp. 88-91); Serrano Laktaw-Del Pilar, 24 May 1889 (p. 137).

17. Serrano Laktaw-Del Pilar, 24 May 1889, *ibid.*, p. 137.

demand a clarification from the Manila government. At the same time, he asked a former Philippine official by the name of Benigno Quiroga, his personal friend and contact with Becerra, to use his influence on the Overseas Minister. He also wrote Rafael M. Labra, autonomist deputy for Cuba in the Cortes, to bring up the matter at the sessions of that august body. Meanwhile, Miguel Morayta, long time friend of the Filipino Propagandists and a leading figure in Spanish Masonry, was requested to call to a meeting the members of the *Asociación Hispano-Filipina*, of which Morayta was president. A telegram was likewise sent to Rizal, then in Paris, with instructions to pass on the information to Antonio Regidor, another exile of 1872, then residing in London. As Del Pilar wrote Rizal, all Filipinos scattered all over Spain and the rest of Europe must join forces, speaking with one voice, to help their countrymen in prison.¹⁸ Sympathetic sectors of the Spanish press were also contacted with a view to giving as wide publicity as possible to the incident. And, as was to be expected, *La Solidaridad*, under Del Pilar's editorship, played up the arrests with reports, comments, and purported letters from Manila.

Father John Schumacher gives the following assessment of Del Pilar's handling of the incident:

Here Del Pilar is seen as activist in high gear. He was no illusionist, but he made the most of possibilities and opportunities at hand. He might make use of his varied political connections for particular immediate ends; he would neglect nothing that could possibly be helpful, but regarding their efficacy towards achieving the principal ends he sought, he privately expressed considerable skepticism.¹⁹

The principal ends were the same for Del Pilar and Rizal: both looked forward to the eventual independence of the Philippines.²⁰ But they differed widely with regard to method, policy, and priorities in the struggle for national liberation. Del Pilar's strategy was to stir up public opinion in Spain and the rest of Europe, and utilize every available channel of influence and pressure on the Spanish government and people. He opted for political maneuvers within the existing social and political structures, convinced as he still was of the value of his press and political connections, and of

18. Del Pilar-Rizal, 8 April 1889, *ibid.*, pp. 87-88; *Ep. Riz.*, 2:160.

19. Schumacher, *Propaganda Movement*, p. 143.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

working for his country while remaining abroad.²¹ Rizal, however, was to take a different course of action.

The day after he received the cable, Rizal wrote the Filipinos in Barcelona a letter which must have given them pause in their frenzied efforts to help the Manila prisoners. To Del Pilar's surprise and chagrin, Rizal received the news of the arrests not without a certain sense of welcome. What made him lose sleep, he said, was the thought not of the arrests themselves, but of the sorrow of the families concerned and the cowardly conduct that detainees were wont to exhibit.²² Persecutions and intrigues were like a surgical operation on a sick person — a necessary evil designed to cure a sick society. They served to open the eyes of those asleep and harm the prestige of the persecutors. To some of the Filipinos in Spain, Rizal appeared again, as often in the past, to take on a moralistic posture. Clearly, his concern was not the release of the prisoners, but their proper behavior in time of adversity. For him, the more immediate and important task of the Filipinos was not their liberation at any cost and by any means, but their moral regeneration and education for freedom. So as to be deserving of their freedom, they must learn the virtues of fortitude and integrity by passing through the crucible of suffering. He wrote:

If the Filipinos in this cruel and unequal struggle show fortitude and integrity against all odds and all their enemies, then it will be because they are worthy of freedom and then they will be able to say: *dumating na ang tadhana!* [The hour of destiny has come!] If not, if they are cowardly and weak, let the tree mature first; for if it is cut down before its time, the weevil will eat into it and it will be of no use.

No, by his own strong affirmation, the secular intellectual atmosphere in Europe had not diminished his trust in God.

Perhaps you wonder that the *Calambano* who has ridiculed many beliefs and superstitions should believe firmly in Providence. The fact is that *Calainos* has more faith in God than all the friars put together and believes that God watches over His creatures and helps those who have valor and good will.²³

Hence, he took a dim and skeptical view of the efforts to influence Becerra. He had learned his lesson: he had written Becerra before on behalf of his brother-in-law Manuel Hidalgo, twice

21. See *Ep. Riz.*, vol. 2: Del Pilar-Rizal, 8 April 1889, p. 161; Del Pilar-Laong Laan [Rizal], 18 May 1889, p. 175.

22. Rizal-Members of the Association "La Solidaridad," 2 April 1889, *Ep. Riz.*, 2:157.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-58.

banished in 1888 to Tagbilaran for alleged subversive activities in connection with the Calamba dispute, only to be rebuffed with silence and inaction.²⁴ In fact, he said he would not take any step to obtain favor for the prisoners; he would approve only of legal and judicial measures, not the use of political influence or compromise. "Let those whose rights have been violated go to the courts, if they can." Then followed the crucial injunction: "if not, let them appeal to God (*que acudan a Dios*)."²⁵ He enjoined recourse not to friendly politicians in the Cortes, or even to the Queen Regent, but only to the supreme authority of God. Truly a very strange appeal for the secularist, rationalist, deist Rizal to make! But it is an important notion in Rizal, this "appeal to God," which we shall now examine. It is in fact the key to the understanding of his notion of divine providence.

Let us first raise the question: Why must God be appealed to?

The answer is to be found in a letter Rizal wrote two weeks later to the Filipinos in Barcelona upon learning that possession of antifriar literature was the reason of the arrests. Here he became almost ecstatic. He stated: "Although we ought to regret it as a *private* misfortune, we ought to applaud it as a *general* good."²⁶ He recalled the year 1872 and saw the hand of divine providence behind this crucial event in his people's history. He went on:

Without 1872 there would not be at this hour a Plaridel, or a Jaena, or a San-cianco, or any of the brave and generous Filipino colonies in Europe; without 1872 Rizal would now be a Jesuit, and instead of writing the *Noli me tângere*, would have written the opposite. At the sight of these injustices and cruelties, my imagination even as a child was awakened and I swore to dedicate myself to avenging some day the lives of such noble victims; with this idea I have gone on studying, and all my works and writings bear out this conviction: God will some day give me the opportunity to fulfill my promise!²⁷

Similarly, the Filipinos must see the same hand of providence in their present trials; for, under God, they could not but triumph, and the unexpected might well come to pass. He exclaimed:

Good! Let them commit abuses. Let there be imprisonments, exiles, executions. Good! Let Destiny be fulfilled! The day they lay their hands

24. See the unpublished letters edited by Schumacher in this issue, pp. 237-53.

25. *Ep. Riz.*, 2:158.

26. Rizal-Members of the Association "La Solidaridad," 18 April 1889, *Ep. Riz.*, 2:166. Italics mine.

27. *Ibid.*

on us and make martyrs of our innocent families, farewell, profriar government, and perhaps, farewell too, government of Spain.²⁸

For Rizal, as Cesar Adib Majul has so brilliantly pointed out, the formation of a new national community, a Filipino nation,²⁹ had become a necessity — a task which Rizal was to assign to the *Liga Filipina* as its primary objective: in the words of its constitution, “to unite the whole archipelago into one compact, vigorous, and homogeneous body.”³⁰ “A man in the Philippines is only an individual,” Rizal sharply observed in his *Sobre la indolencia de los filipinos*, “he is not a member of a nation.”³¹ And in his letter to Father Vicente García he deplored the lack of a national tradition. “There is in the Philippines progress or achievement which pertains to the *individual*, but none which is *national, general*. This is the reason why the individual alone achieves perfection, not the species.”³² The sad historical fact was that many an Ibarra, a Sisa, a Crispin, a Basilio, an Elias, and a Cablesang Tales, could not find happiness and the fulfillment of their persons through either of the two distinct, but intimately related institutions, which had for centuries integrated the inhabitants of the disparate islands into some form of unity: namely, the Spanish government and the Catholic Church. To use phraseology common with us today, it was a problem of “structural injustice,” “institutional violence,” or “the unjust and violent structures of society.” Hence, the need of a new national community, — compact, vigorous, homogeneous, and distinct from the political community created by the Spanish Crown and the religious institution of the friar-dominated Church. But we have to add: for Rizal, it was to be, and must always be, a nation under God. Or, to use a biblical phrase, a people of God.

Clearly therefore, when he said that the imprisonment of Basa ought to be regretted as a private misfortune but applauded as a *general* good, he could not but be thinking of this crisis, like the martyrdom of the three priests in 1872, as a divinely guided step

28. Ibid.

29. Cesar Adib Majul, *A Critique of Rizal's Concept of a Filipino Nation* (Quezon City, 1959). I have used Majul's penetrating analysis of Rizal's idea of a Filipino nation for interpreting Rizal's writings pertinent to the two events under discussion.

30. *Escritos de José Rizal*, vol. 7: *Escritos políticos e históricos*, p. 303.

31. Rizal, “Sobre la indolencia de los Filipinos,” *La Solidaridad* 2(15 September 1890): 203.

32. Rizal-Vicente García, 7 January 1891, *Ep. Riz.*, 3:136.

in the direction of Filipino nationhood. To go back then to our question: Why must the Filipinos appeal to God? Simply: because the Filipino people was God's people, and God was leading them in their historic task of laying the foundations of the nation.

NATIONAL MORAL REGENERATION AND THE NEW ETHIC

There was, however, a major deficiency, which the leaders of the emerging community must remedy, namely, the weakness of the national moral character.

For what is the use of consecrating our lives to work for a people without a soul, without sentiments? Suppose we liberate them today from the tyranny of the friar; tomorrow they will fall under the tyranny of the bureaucracy (*la tiranía de los empleados*).³³

It was axiomatic with Rizal that the people got only the type of government that they deserved. He had paraphrased a popular adage: "Like people, like government."³⁴ If the government was tyrannical, it was because the people allowed it to be so. A morally weak government could not long endure among a people that was not morally weak. A people possessed of the moral virtues of fortitude and integrity, coupled with the intellectual virtues such as the love of truth and the habit of study, could not but produce a government that would establish the conditions for justice and freedom. Hence, suffering and death, by reason of their instructive as well as redemptive value, were the means God was presently using in leading the people toward nationhood. "A sickness ties us to the bed, then takes our life away. But what matters is that this sickness and this death be not useless to those who survive."³⁵ Suffering is like a cauterization which stimulates the regeneration of a diseased bodily organ. Imprisonment, harassment, and even death — all these would toughen the overly tender skin of the Filipino people and strengthen the national moral fiber. For the cowardly and the weak, Rizal, his country's physician, prescribed none other than treatment by fire.

In his diagnosis, there was a dearth of good example to inject for-

33. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

34. Rizal, "Sobre la indolencia de los Filipinos," p. 202. See also Cesar Adib Majul, *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution*, rev. ed. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1967), p. 24.

35. Rizal-Members of the Association "La Solidaridad," 18 April 1889, *Ep. Riz.*, 2:166.

titude, integrity, and enthusiasm into the people's moral character.

What we lack today are men who from their prison cells and places of exile show fortitude and integrity to give example to the people and arouse their enthusiasm, like the ancient Christian martyrs, like the nihilists.³⁶

Fortitude is contagious. And the power of example moves history, changes the character of the people. Alluding to reports that in 1872 at the hour of execution Father José Burgos had wept like a child, while Father Mariano Gómez, head held high, stood erect and serene, blessing the crowd, he expressed regret that Burgos had fallen short of the ideal. "If Burgos at his death had shown the fortitude of Gomez, the Filipinos would be other than what they are today."³⁷ But the prospect of his own death added a sober note to his idealism; he went on:

Nevertheless, no one knows how he will behave in that supreme moment, and I myself who now preach and boast so much, perhaps I will show more fear and less courage than Burgos in that last hour. Life is so pleasant, and it is a repugnant thing to die so young and with one's head full of ideas.³⁸

Finally, his message for the Manila prisoners was terse, direct, and prophetic: "let them know that imprisonment is not death, and even if it were, what is death? Do they not believe in God?"³⁹ The implication is clear: faith in God gave hope and assurance that through their death God would redeem and raise the people into a new and vigorous nation.

If example was needed, then the Filipino Propagandists must be the first ones to give it. Hence, *La Solidaridad*, he wrote Del Pilar in June of 1889, must now adopt a new policy, "a policy of fortitude and genuine *solidaridad*" namely, the complete abandonment of pseudonyms. The use of real names (as Rizal himself had done) would prove the fearlessness of the writers and inspire others by their example:

Imagine if there appear the names of Blumentritt, M. del Pilar, Jaena, Luna,

36. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.* Contemporary accounts indicate that in his own hour of execution Rizal made a conscious and deliberate effort to die a noble death and set an example for his people. He did not want to be shot in the back and asked to face the firing squad. He refused a blindfold and would not kneel, and asked that his head be spared. The Spanish officer-in-charge did not permit him to face the firing squad; but he stood up, eyes uncovered watching the bay and the morning sky, *alza la tersa frente*, and was shot in the heart. Retana, *Vida y escritos*, p. 431-32; [Pablo Pastells, S.J.], *La masonización de Filipinas. Rizal y su obra* (Barcelona: Librería y Tipografía Católica, 1897), p. 40.

39. *Ep. Riz.*, 2:168.

etc. Our countrymen — on seeing our courage, on seeing the courage of not only one but many, on seeing that Rizal is not the exception but the general rule — will also gain courage and lose their fear. There is nothing like example.⁴⁰

Fortitude begets fortitude, example begets example. The day that Plaridels and Rizals should increase in number to be the pillars of the nation, then the Filipinos would be a people united, supporting one another in peace and freedom.

Be convinced that if life is dangerous for the authors of the *Noli* and *La Soberania Monacal*, it is because they are isolated cases. But the day that Plaridels and Rizals abound, the day that Ponce, Panganiban, Graciano, Apacible, Icasiano, Llorente, and others publish their works and return home, we shall live out there [the Philippines] as peacefully as here [Europe]. When only one column supports a weight, it can crash down; but if there are many columns, the danger is not so great.⁴¹

But more important, the fearless use of real names would point to the ethic of selfless motivation which must characterize the network of relationships in the new national community; for the man who would courageously take up the pen in this crusade must renounce fortune, life, and all. The nation-builder must work for the nation, not himself; for utterly selfless motives, not personal interests; or else, God would not bless his work. In another harsh judgment on Burgos, Rizal claimed that God did not support him because there was a tinge of self-interest in his fight for the secularization of the parishes.

Be convinced of this fact, that for every good example of a Filipino, thousands upon thousands will be won over in geometric progression; that God or Destiny is with us because we have justice and reason on our side and because we fight not for any selfish motive but for the sacred love of our country and our countrymen. The men that have preceded us fought for their own interests, and therefore God did not support them — Novales for promotions, Cuesta for vengeance, Burgos for his curacies. We, however, fight that justice may prevail, we fight for liberty, for the sacred rights of man, we ask nothing for ourselves, we sacrifice all for the common good. What have we to fear?⁴²

In extreme circumstances, this ethic might well demand that the Filipinos take up arms. The future was uncertain. But no matter, if they kept courage and single-mindedness, God would make them triumph in the end.

40. Rizal-Del Pilar, 22 June 1889, *Ep. Riz.*, 2:200.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

42. *Ibid.*

We are not revolutionaries, nor do we want bloodshed, nor harbor hatreds. And we shall have recourse to force only when all means shall have been exhausted, when we are given no choice but to fight or die, in which case God then gives to each man the right to defend himself in the manner he can. Then we shall be within our rights, and like the North Americans we shall do battle for our just cause, and we shall triumph. What have we to fear?⁴³ Indeed, many a time he let go his anger, toned down only by his devastating humor.

If I had a son and saw him in the mouth of the shark, I would not try to pull him out. It would be useless; he would only be torn to pieces. Rather, I would kill the shark if I could; if not, I would ambush it. Well, the friars are either sharks or merely *dalag*. If they are sharks, they must be killed. If *dalag*, there is no need to fear them. But I am inclined to think they are *dalag*, hence I am not afraid to fall into their hands.⁴⁴

To summarize briefly then. We have shown why Rizal believed that the Filipinos must appeal to God: they were God's people, the founding of the nation was their God-appointed task. We have also pointed out that Rizal considered the moral education of the Filipino as a prior and immediate imperative, demanded that the national leaders be models of fortitude and moral integrity, and defined the ethic that must govern relationships within the new national community: namely, selfless motivation for the common good.

SELF-RELIANCE

There remains one final question: What does appeal to God mean in the practical order? Surely, Rizal meant that we must pray to God, thank Him for His guidance, and ask that His will be always done. But was Rizal content with mere inspirational exhortations and vague moralisms, or did his trust in divine providence define the character of political action that the Filipino must now embrace? The question has been answered in some way by what has already been said. But the answer gains sharper focus in Rizal's reaction to the fall from office of the Overseas Minister Manuel Becerra.

The appointment of Becerra as Overseas Minister in 1888 had raised the hopes of the Filipino Propagandists, inasmuch as together with Sagasta, the head of the government, he belonged to the liberal faction of Spanish politics and had implemented some initial reforms in the Philippines. The Filipinos in Spain kept pressing Becerra

43. Ibid.

44. Rizal-Members of the Association "La Solidaridad," *Ep. Riz.*, 2:168.

to institute further reforms, especially Philippine representation in the Spanish Cortes.⁴⁵ In turn Becerra responded with numerous and bright promises, but did next to nothing about them. On 3 March 1890, at the urging of Del Pilar, Francisco Calvo Muñoz, a peninsular Spaniard who had allied himself to the cause of Philippine reform, presented to the Cortes a proposal providing three Philippine deputies, in the form of an amendment to a new electoral code under discussion. Becerra rose up to approve the proposal in principle, even suggesting that it was not liberal enough, but questioned the timeliness of such a measure, stating as his reason the state of ignorance among the Filipinos. He himself was instituting reforms in the direction of granting to the Philippines parliamentary representation in the Cortes, assuring his audience that such reforms were being implemented without delay. The following day, in view of Becerra's intervention, the amendment was withdrawn.

This elicited an article from Rizal defending the amendment and arguing that parliamentary representation, together with freedom of the press, was the best remedy to the problem of ignorance.⁴⁶ Rizal ended the article sternly reminding Becerra of the motto: "Do not leave for tomorrow what should be done today."

Del Pilar, however, whatever his private misgivings, did not allow Becerra's temporizing attitude to slacken his political maneuvers. Together with the Filipinos in Barcelona, he further pressed the issue and sent a petition to Becerra with the following demands: (1) representation in the Cortes, (2) abolition of prior censorship, and (3) prohibition of governmental deportation without judicial sentence. Since this last touched on a matter of personal concern to Rizal in view of the Calamba troubles, Del Pilar suggested to Rizal that he might enlist the support of the "Grand Family" of Masonry and have them apply pressure on their fellow Mason Becerra.⁴⁷ Rizal again refused.

On 3 July 1890, barely four months after Rizal's fateful warning, the Sagasta government fell and Becerra with it. Immediately, Rizal dashed off an article bitterly entitled "Una esperanza," and sent it to *La Solidaridad*. This short piece is remarkable in that his incisive analysis of this secular political event took

45. For the account of the campaign for parliamentary representation, see Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement*, pp. 178-85.

46. Rizal, "Filipinas en el congreso," *La Solidaridad* 2(31 March 1890): 69-71.

47. Del Pilar-Rizal, 18 May 1889, *Ep. Riz.*, 2:176.

on a profoundly religious interpretation. After stating how Becerra forgot his promise to bring up again the question of parliamentary representation, he paused for a prayerful invocation: "Oh, You who have made the human heart believe in human promises, why did You not give men a part of Your inflexible will and a reflection of Your memory so that he can remember his words?"⁴⁸ He pointed to the nub of the problem: Becerra was only too human. "We have hoped in a man!"⁴⁹ Nonetheless, he threw the blame not on Becerra, but on "circumstances and men," meaning the all too human social and political structures in Spain, of which Becerra, friends like Morayta, Quiroga, and Calvo Muñoz, and the Grand Family of Masonry (to which many of the Propagandists belonged) were very much a part.⁵⁰ The big mistake of the Filipinos was to have placed their trust in structures where God could no longer be found, inasmuch as these structures were oppressive of the Filipinos, depriving them of justice and freedom.

Then come the concluding lines of the article, a solemn prayer as well as a prophetic exhortation to his people:

Now, let the Filipino people, without losing trust in men, place their confidence on Something higher, on One with better memory, on One who knows better the value of justice and a sacred promise.

God has made man free and has promised victory to one who perseveres, to one who fights, to one who does his work well.

God has promised man his redemption when he shall have offered his sacrifice.

Let man fulfill his duty and God will fulfill his!⁵¹

Never again must the Filipinos rely on human justice and human memory, but must place their hope in the God of justice, the God who is ever mindful of his people. The Filipinos must realize that their salvation rested not in any alien political institution, but in the hands of God. This meant, in the practical order, that the Filipinos must now trust in their own selves as a new collectivity because it was God leading them on to their collective destiny.

Thus, increasingly he could not see eye to eye with Del Pilar till the final break between them in 1891. He was convinced that the immediate and primary task of the Propaganda Movement was the politicalization, or to use a word of recent mintage, the "conscien-

48. Rizal, "Una Esperanza," *La Solidaridad* 2(15 July 1890): 153-54.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

tization" of the Filipino. His articles and protests were addressed more and more to Filipinos rather than Spaniards. His *Noli* and *Fili* were written not for Europeans but for Filipinos; hence, he tried every means to smuggle as many copies as possible to the Philippines. Then he decided that he would write his third novel in the language his people understood, Tagalog, a project which he sadly had to abandon, partly due to lack of time, partly in frustration over his inadequate mastery of his own native tongue — he had been away from his beloved country so long. After a while, he no longer saw any value in *La Solidaridad* and refused to write for it. Finally, against the advice of friend and foe, of his own confidant Blumentritt, and even his own family, he decided to return to the Philippines, deeply aware that death might well be waiting on her shores.⁵² Upon his arrival he set about founding the *Liga Filipina*, the whole aim of which was to teach the Filipinos the lesson of self-reliance for their own total well-being. The physician could not heal from a distance, he must come to the patient's bedside with the medicine. A courageous, exemplary life among the people in the Philippines would itself be a living book more valuable than the *Noli*. The field of battle was no longer Spain or Europe, but the Philippines. Listen to Rizal's own final verdict on the conduct of the Propaganda, pronounced, significantly enough, in the accents of his own Calamba Tagalog:

Kung ang inasahan ng ating mga kababayan ay tayo rito sa Europa, ay totoo silang namamali. Ako'y ayaw mag daya sa kanino man. Kung walang salapi ay wala tayong malaking magagawa. Ang ating maitutulong sa kanila, ay ang *ating buhay sa ating bayan*. Yaong kamalian ng lahat, na tayo'y makatutulong dito sa malayo, ay salang sala mandin. Ang gamot ay dapat ilapit sa may sakit. Dañgan at di ko ibig paikliin ang buhay ng aking mga magulang, di ako sana umalis sa Filipinas anomang mangyari. Yaong limang buan itinira ko roon ay isang halimbawang buhay, isang librong magaling na di lalo sa *Noli me tângere*. Ang parang na paglalabanan ay ang Filipinas: doon tayo dapat magtatagpo. Ypalayo ng Diyos at huwag mamatay ang aking mga magulang at muling makikita ninyo ako sa ating bayan. Doon tayo magtutulong-tulong, doon tayo samasamang magdusa o magtagumpay kaya.

Ang karamihan ng mga kababayan sa Europa ay takot, layo sa sunog. at matapang lamang habang layo sa panganib at nasa payapang bayan! Huag umasa ang Filipinas; umasa sa sariling lakas.

52. Rizal arrived in Manila on 26 June 1892; ten days later he was placed under arrest and banished as a political exile to Dapitan. See *Diarios y memorias*, pp. 266–67.

If our countrymen place their hopes in ourselves who are here in Europe, they are truly mistaken. I do not want to deceive anyone. If we have no funds, we cannot accomplish much. We can best help our countrymen by *living our lives in our own land*. This idea that we shall be able to help them out here at a distance, is completely false. The medicine must be brought near to the patient. If it were not for the fact that I did not want to shorten the lives of my parents, I would not have left the Philippines come what may. My brief stay of five months back home was a living example; it was in itself a book of greater worth than the *Noli me tângere*. The field of battle is the Philippines: there we ought to meet. God forbid that my parents die, and you shall see me return to our land. There we shall help one another, together we shall suffer, or be victorious perhaps.

Most of our countrymen in Europe are afraid; they run away from the fire; they are brave as long as they are far away from danger and dwell in a peaceful land! Let not the Philippines hope in them; let her place hope in her own strength.⁵³

It is difficult to miss the severe and threatening tone of Rizal's language. In moments when human frustration drove him to appeal to the superior and firmer principle of God's providence, the shadow of a possible bloody revolution was never absent. But revolution was always a last resort, to be taken up only in extreme circumstances and in God's name. For Rizal, the establishment of the nation was the prerequisite and justification for revolution; hence, the task of nation-building had prior importance over revolutionary action.⁵⁴ Only the nation could be the assurance that the revolution would not merely replace the present tyranny with the new tyranny of a segment or class in society. And when the new national community should have been so established as to render superfluous the political community of the Spanish colony, then it could peacefully pressure Spain to grant its emancipation, or, if Spain refused, launch a revolution. In either case, under God's guidance, the nation could not fail.

The meaning then of appeal to God becomes clear: the Filipinos must now look beyond alien institutions to the God who guides the destinies of men and nations; under God, they must work out their own redemption; they must now take their future where God had placed it — into their own hands.⁵⁵

53. Fragmentos de una carta de Rizal (October 1891?), *Ep. Riz.*, 3:250–51.

54. Majul, *Rizal's Concept of a Filipino Nation*, pp. 43–59.

55. In his pioneering book, *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (pp. 87–91), Majul has shown how the idea of divine providence as intervening in the course of history was very much part of Mabini's political thought. Majul has also

In conclusion then, Rizal's interpretation of his country's history, far from being purely secularist, was profoundly religious, inspired no doubt by his Catholic faith: the ultimate meaning of historical events was to be found in the transhistorical reality of God's providence. Trust in God meant not a fatalistic submission to the course of history, but the pursuit of one's *tadhana*, the acceptance of an awesome task, namely, the founding of a new, vigorous, compact national community. In the light of his view of Philippine history as governed by Providence, he also defined the new ethic that must govern the nation. Self-reliance: the Filipino must solve his political, economic, and social problems, drawing from the strength of his spirit and the wealth of his God-given resources. A high moral code of personal behavior: fortitude and personal integrity would give solidarity to the nation. The leader above all must set the example: he must live among the people. And the foremost principle of all, selfless motivation for the common good: the Filipino must be prepared to give all, even life itself, for the nation. For Rizal, violent revolution remained always an option, but as a last resort to be taken only in God's name, secondary to the prior and more important task of moral regeneration and nation-building.

Briefly, for our national hero "Bahala ang May Kapal!" meant "Dumating na ang tadhana!," "Umasa sa sariling lakas!" Certainly those of us who wish to construct a Filipino ideology, a Filipino political philosophy, a Filipino liberation theology, or a new Filipino society, can learn something from Rizal.

noted the complementarity between Rizal's theory of freedom and Mabini's theory of providence. "Since virtues or morality led men to be free [Rizal's] and since a virtuous people fulfilled the plans of Providence [Mabini's], it followed that a people in the path of freedom was not only fulfilling the plans of Providence, but was also being protected by it. This would further imply that any nation which prevented a virtuous people from gaining its freedom would feel the retribution of Providence." (p. 90)

It may be added, in the view of what has been said in this paper, that Rizal had his own understanding of providence with which his idea of freedom was linked, and that Rizal's notion of providence must be accorded historical priority over Mabini's.

Majul further states of Mabini's idea of providence: "The assertion that the historic process is guided by Providence may be one of the few principles found in any Filipino political thinker that closely suggests a 'philosophy of history.' As such, there was nothing novel in this approach; for the above principle was part and parcel of the Scholastic tradition in the Thomistic line, that the affairs of men bear the mark of God's plan." (p. 91) This statement may be equally, and with greater reason, applied to Rizal's (historically prior) view of God's providence.