

philippine studies

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

Ballie of UP; High Tension

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Philippine Studies vol. 8, no. 1 (1960): 186—189

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Book Reviews

BAILLIE OF UP

HIGH TENSION: THE RECOLLECTIONS OF HUGH BAILLIE.
New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959. xii, 300p. Illust.

As a reporter on the staff of *The Record*, Hugh Baillie watched Los Angeles hack its greatness out of the San Bernardino foothills. There he saw Clarence Darrow, already a famous figure, brought to the merciless bar of public opinion, only to bounce back and become indisputably the country's top lawyer. There, too, Baillie got himself ushered into a job that set him to keeping pace with the crazily unflagging spin of a world that would not stop its hectic go, go, go.

He joined the United Press.

With the UP (first as reporter, then as salesman, finally as president), he saw just about everything happen: Wilson racing through his great republic, wasting upon imperspicuous Americans a prim and scholarly plea for the support of a soon-to-be-orphaned League of Nations; a sleepless king, beleaguered by politics, turning his Windsor back on the throne of his ancestors for "the woman I love"; Chamberlain and his ubiquitous umbrella, making the point—half tragic, half comic—that there would be "peace in our time" even as Hitler was bullying his Aryan way through central Europe; Italian black shirts chanting "*Duce! Duce! Duce!*" before an imperial balcony; and the unconquerable MacArthur, caving in at last under the unaccountable weight of international diplomacy. At point-blank range, Hugh Baillie saw, spoke, or listened to them all. And the first 280 pages of his book are an enthralling if noisy play-back of a forty-five-year record.

In effect, Baillie has done for the outgoing crop of American journalists what Harold Loeb did last year for the Lost Generation of American litterateurs in *The Way It Was*. He has recaptured for them, in nostalgic minutiae, the tempo and the fight, the clamor

and the cheering of a passing age. One by one, through beat after beat and from one interview to another, the names of a bygone day keep coming up. Some are still remembered by many; others live merely in the private reminiscences of a few in a brotherhood that at one time proclaimed membership with trench coat and red mittens and occasional pencil stuck behind the ear. Where Loeb would mention Tristan Tzara, Malcolm Cowley, and Louis Aragon, however, Baillie would name Ben Allen, the elder Hagerty (father of Eisenhower's press secretary), and Barney Furay (father of one of the editors of this review). Again, instead of James Joyce, e.e. cummings, and Ernest Hemingway, there speed through the pages, big as life, Webb Miller, Gainza Paz, and Randolph Churchill.

But Baillie's intention is not merely to parade personalities or to organize memorabilia. He is, of course, eminently successful in doing both: few newsmen today seem able to write as vividly as he does and his capacity for recall is so complete that he can slice any portion of the last half-century and serve you the morsel as fresh and as tangy as if it were up-to-the-minute fare. His book is, however, more than what some enterprising advertiser might call a "reportathon." It is also opinion. Having dedicated it "to the reporters of the free world," Baillie proceeds to use his recollections as a jumping board from which he plunges into a short (one chapter) but somewhat impatient plea for freedom of information. "Nobody is arguing for unrestricted license," he says. And yet, one gathers the impression that the press must have its freedom (not license, if you please) at pretty nearly all costs. He glowers at the third word in the expression "free and *responsible* Press"; not that he is against it, but he thinks it is superfluous.

To be sure, there is much to be said for this view and for the motive behind the impatience. We agree that the press should be at all times responsible, and we also agree that the mistakes of the years covered in Baillie's recollections may never have been committed at all had information been more easily and more immediately available. Perhaps we would never have had to see the sorry spectacle of the world's leaders goading their peoples into rushing at full speed like Gadarene swine to their destruction in the sea. But at least two interpretations are possible as regards Baillie's indignation, and we must disagree with one.

When Baillie implies that we need not emphasize the recent plethora of ideas concerning press responsibility, readers may take this to mean either of two things: (1) that the press should demand so high a standard of morality of its newsmen that any codes underscoring responsibility are rendered fatuous; or (2) that, whatever the moral condition of newsmen, the very idea of restraint as regards the dissemination of information is at once repugnant and deserving of the strongest condemnation.

If Baillie intends the first meaning, as it is supposed he does, there can be no quarrel with him: the moves towards the professionalization of journalism are premised on the idea that standards, both technical and moral, exist against which the performance of newsmen can be measured.

But some may feel that Baillie actually intends the second meaning, in which case, what sanctions will guarantee the newspaperman's "respect for the rights of others [and] regard for public order"? What or who will provide the "positive defense to those human, moral and social values which are our common heritage"? These questions are not to be taken as an advocacy of legal restraint by external authority. With the 1957 statement of the American bishops on censorship, we hold that the principle which serves to safeguard all our vital freedoms must be upheld, and this is "to curb less rather than more; to hold for liberty rather than restraint." But precisely because we do away with external authority, we must insist on responsibility. We sometimes forget, in the flesh-and-blood struggle for freedom, that liberty has a moral dimension. Wherever man-made legal restrictions are torn down, no punitive weight in the here and now remains with sanctions which nevertheless retain their moral and spiritual value. This, again, is the reason for demanding of newsmen a high standard of morality.

We understand how harrassed the UP president may have been through the long years of the fight for freedom—freedom especially from unjust restrictions on news agents and news agencies, whether by totalitarian decrees or by unfair competition. We hope, however, that no slur is intended against certain regimens when he speaks of a code of responsibility amounting to a "vow of chastity". The glare, furthermore, need not be on his face whenever a case is made for press responsibility. It would be nice to be able to assume that a newsmen, by the very fact that he is a newsmen, is therefore responsible. This, however, is begging the question: the proof of the pudding, even in our age of instant-mixes, is still in the eating which, when properly done, does not take an instant.

Baillie's stand here is at least debatable. Many students of journalism, for instance, are still divided about the case of the AP's Ed Kennedy who, without authorization, jumped the gun on fellow newsmen in releasing the story of the Nazi surrender. Furthermore, the anonymous newsmen who fed the UP wires with the "scoop" about V-J Day two days before V-J Day actually happened can hardly be anything but irresponsible.

But these are merely side comments on a book which is truly full of many excellences: *High Tension* is absorbing, fast-paced, exciting, informative, and what is best, it does not end. After re-

counting the highlights of his forty-five year fight for press freedom, Baillie—in retirement—says that the fight goes on and his book is “To be continued”.

ANTONIO G. MANUUD

HOW CHRIST WAS CONDEMNED

THE TRIAL OF JESUS; the Jewish and Roman proceedings against Jesus Christ described and assessed from the oldest accounts. By Josef Blinzler; translated from the second revised and enlarged German edition by Isabel and Florence McHugh. Westminster, Maryland: 1959. xi, 312 p.

Father Joseph Blinzler, professor since 1949 of New Testament Studies in the Philosophico-Theological Academy of Passau in Bavaria, and rector since 1958 of the same institution, sets himself the task of finding a definitive answer to the question: Who was legally responsible for the condemnation and execution of Jesus Christ? The answer at which he arrives, after a most scholarly, and for the reader, satisfyingly thorough sifting of the available evidence, is stated in clear, unequivocal terms: “Anyone who undertakes to assess the trial of Jesus as a historical and legal event . . . must come to the conclusion . . . that the main responsibility rests upon the Jews” (p. 290).

To Catholic readers, that may appear to be belaboring the obvious. But Father Blinzler's conclusion is neither obvious, nor even acceptable to many a non-Catholic reader. Jewish authors especially, as one would expect, contest its correctness. Extremists among them have sought to exculpate the Jews by denying the reliability of the Gospel accounts, labeling them distortions and misrepresentations. The Prague Jew, Karl Katz, for example, claims that “Caiphas loved and revered Jesus”—Jesus was condemned and crucified by Pilate on account of his claim to kingship. Other writers without going quite that far nevertheless maintain that it was the Romans rather than the Jews who were primarily responsible for Christ's death.

One need not read far in this book to realize that the trial of Jesus has been and still is a much discussed problem. Father Blinzler's footnote references are surprisingly numerous, and his bibliography correspondingly lengthy and rich. In recent years, a fresh spate of studies was occasioned by Hitler's persecution of the Jews. After the Dictator's collapse in 1945, more than one Jewish writer, in understandable and anguished resentment at the Nazis' mass murder of German Jews, blamed the Christian Gospel for the blood and violence that swirled around non-Aryan residents of Germany before and during World War II. “It was repeatedly stated on the part of the Jews that