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The Rizal Bill of 1956

Horacio de la Costa and the Bishops

Several drafts of a pastoral letter, written by Horacio de la Costa for the bishops in 1952, survive. De la Costa's Rizal emerges as an outstanding moral figure whose devotion to the truth made his novels a source of moral as well as social and political wisdom for Filipinos. Although subsequent drafts show he was forced by an unknown interlocutor to temper this view, he retained an essentially positive reading of the novels. In the face of Recto's 1956 bill imposing the novels, however, Abp. Rufino J. Santos commissioned Fr. Jesus Cavanna to draft a new "Statement." Beginning with a few positive paragraphs from De la Costa, the "Statement" then absolutely condemned the novels and forbade their reading, a prohibition that proved quite ineffective. The drafts of De la Costa show that there was within the Catholic Church a totally different attitude toward Rizal, whose legacy the church could embrace.

KEYWORDS: CATHOLIC CHURCH · JOSÉ RIZAL · CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS · PHILIPPINE NATIONALISM

Reynaldo Ileto (2010), in a recent essay, has studied the efforts of the 1950s to create a new vision for the nation in the wake of independence. Prominent was the newspaperman Jose Lansang, who expressed some of his ideas as speechwriter for Pres. Elpidio Quirino, but, more importantly, was associated with a number of professors from the University of the Philippines in envisioning a secular nationalist program for building the nation. In Lansang's vision what was needed was what Ileto calls a "new Propaganda Movement" of these latter-day *ilustrados*. Parallel to Lansang's appeal to the nineteenth century was wartime president Jose P. Laurel's Rizalian educational philosophy, it too envisioning a secular nationalism.

As a foil to Lansang Ileto (*ibid.*, 233) singles out Fr. Horacio de la Costa, SJ, returned in 1951 to the Ateneo de Manila with a PhD in history from Harvard University, as representing "the Catholic position" toward building the nation. Although Ileto makes brief mention of Senate Bill 438 in 1956, introduced by Sen. Claro M. Recto and sponsored by Laurel, making Rizal's two novels compulsory reading in all colleges and universities, he does not specifically attach Father de la Costa to the conflict over that bill (which indeed falls outside the scope of his article). But as a matter of fact, De la Costa would play a contested, but hidden, role in that controversy. It seems worthwhile to examine how this Jesuit intellectual looked to Rizal as the inspiration for another view of nation building, to see that there was more than one view in the Catholic Church than appeared in the bishops' letter of 1956. As Ileto (*ibid.*) says, "the descendants of [Rizal's] teachers were not about to surrender their Rizal to the national visions of a Lansang, or even a Laurel." Although in the end other views prevailed, De la Costa's Rizal, based on accurate historical scholarship and a contemporary nationalist vision, could have let the Catholic Church come to terms with Rizal as builder of the nation.

It appears that, at the request of a committee of the bishops, De la Costa had drawn up a draft pastoral letter on the novels of Rizal "some years" before 1956, when Recto introduced a bill, sponsored by Sen. Jose P. Laurel, prescribing their reading in all public and private schools (Kennally 1956a).¹ In fact, the initiative for De la Costa's work must be dated late 1951, since on 5 January 1952 Dean Jose M. Hernandez of the University of the East, who had published a book on Rizal in 1950, forwarded to De la Costa through Sen. Francisco "Soc" Rodrigo nine pages of passages from Rizal's

Noli me tángere, supposedly containing attacks on, or praises of, the church (Hernandez 1952).² Several drafts of a proposed letter are to be found among De la Costa's papers, as his original was modified in response to criticisms from another source.

It has not been possible to identify this source for certain. At first sight, it does not seem to have been Fr. Jesus Cavanna, CM, who was the principal author of the 1956 "Statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on the novels of Dr. Jose Rizal *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo*" (Kennally 1956a; Constantino 1971, 244). For the "Statement" is drastically different in text and in tone from De la Costa's drafts, even though it did make some use of his final draft in its opening paragraphs.

That being said, however, it is still possible that Cavanna was responsible for the gradual changes that appear here, before breaking drastically from De la Costa's drafts. For he published a book on Rizal's retraction of Masonry in 1952, which he had been preparing since 1951 or earlier.³ Hence his own work on Rizal coincided in time with that of De la Costa's. Moreover, it is likely that the bishops might solicit the aid of more than one expert priest, and it is difficult to name others aside from these two. Nonetheless, it is apparent from the extant drafts that De la Costa was the principal author and, if the bishops' committee had also named Cavanna, it would be as interlocutor to De la Costa. Presumably the two men were expected to come to a common text. Since there are no letters from Father Cavanna among De la Costa's papers (Allayban 2010), any such contribution to De la Costa's drafts must have been made in meeting(s) of the two men, with De la Costa producing a new draft subsequently. This could not have happened in 1956, since De la Costa had been finishing his term as dean of the Ateneo de Manila College of Arts and Sciences in the early months and was already abroad some weeks before the bill was introduced on 4 April 1956 (Acosta 1973, 71).⁴ Moreover, the Jesuit vice-provincial was not aware of any activity of De la Costa in this matter in 1956 and wrote to him as if the appearance of the pastoral letter and Cavanna's principal authorship were entirely unknown to De la Costa (Kennally 1956a). It is quite certain then that the modifications made by De la Costa in his successive drafts were made in 1952, whoever may have been his interlocutor.

If Cavanna were that interlocutor in 1952, he would only have made suggestions to De la Costa and could not drastically alter the draft. In 1956 he was principal author and was free to make little or no use of De la Costa's

drafts. Moreover, in 1956 Abp. Rufino J. Santos, the future cardinal, was administrative president of the Catholic Welfare Organization, and it would be over his signature that the bishop's statement would appear, as will be seen below. Santos was noted for his intransigence on matters of church doctrine or practice.⁵ In any case, the identity of the interlocutor does not matter for the purpose of this article, which is to display the differing attitudes toward Rizal and his novels within the church, most especially the views of De la Costa as a Catholic protagonist of the "new Propaganda Movement."

Among De la Costa's papers, there are five drafts, all containing many passages of his original, but with significant differences at times. We may name the different drafts A, B, C, D, and E. All of them are carbon copies, the originals presumably having been sent to his critic and/or to the bishops' committee. A is the original draft, twenty typewritten pages. B is another copy of A, but with a few handwritten changes, perhaps made while meeting with his critic. These are all taken up into C, which has a considerable number of further changes. In C the original texts of the passages quoted in the draft disappear from the endnotes, replaced by simple reference notes. C seems to be the definitive draft, which Father Cavanna, as the principal author of the bishops' "Statement," had at hand when he did the composition of that letter. For the "Statement" had quotations that do not appear in A, but do appear in C. D is a drastically shortened version of C, only five pages, though it incorporates an additional paragraph not found elsewhere in the drafts or in the "Statement." Perhaps De la Costa was asked for a shortened version, since it omits all his numerous quotations from the novels, yet it is later than C. It was not used, however, by Cavanna, who rather made use of C. E is a copy of C, with the phrases or paragraphs underlined by De la Costa to indicate the omissions or changes introduced by the "Statement" in the five pages of C used in part by Cavanna as an introduction before launching into the outright condemnations of the novels. Finally, we should note that Cavanna was only the principal author of the bishops' final letter, no doubt supplying all the actual references to Rizal's writings, but there are indications that the bishop(s) themselves may have intervened to strengthen the condemnatory conclusions of the letter and the strict prohibition to read the novels under church law. For reasons which will be seen below, it is most likely that this intervention came from Abp. Rufino J. Santos, as noted above.

It is important therefore to see A, the original draft, though it is too long to reproduce except in summary, as presumably manifesting De la Costa's

own views most clearly. It shows a thorough knowledge of the two novels, from which he quotes copiously to establish his insights into Rizal. The original of these and other quotations in the text appear in two-and-a-half pages of endnotes in Spanish, French, and Latin. It is clearly the work of a scholar, and of one who has veneration for Rizal, whom he sees as having a moral, social, and political message for Filipinos of the twentieth century.

Summary of A

"Among the many illustrious Filipinos who have distinguished themselves for service to their country, the first place of honor belongs, by universal consent, to Dr. José Rizal." For he "possessed to an eminent degree those moral virtues which together make up true patriotism."

He devoted himself to "dispelling the ignorance of his people, raising their moral standards, and combating the injustices and inequality under which they labored." When condemned to death for this as a rebel, he preferred to suffer death rather than abandon the principles on which "the welfare of his country depended."

But his love for his country was not "an unthinking love." It was not one that "attributed all ills to the tyranny and greed of strangers." His "marvelous balance of judgment saved him" from that. He "boldly proclaimed the fact that while the Filipino people suffered greatly from colonial rule, they were as much the victims of their own vices and defects." "While fearless in denouncing the evils of the Spanish colonial administration, he was no less fearless in pointing out to his fellow countrymen their defects. "That is why he could say of the *Noli Me Tangere* that 'my book may have—does have—defects from the artistic, the aesthetic point of view. I do not deny it. But what no one can dispute is the objectivity of my narrative.'"

"For even greater than his utter devotion to his country was his unswerving devotion to the truth." He embraced rationalism because he thought it led to truth. But at the hour of his death, "he permitted neither pride nor passion to hold him back" but rectified his error and embraced the truth in his retraction, and "God who is truth" gave him his reward.

Because of his devotion to truth, he had a clear insight and vision. "No Filipino before or after him has understood so well or so memorably expressed the moral, political, and social principles upon which the peace and prosperity of our beloved country must be based." "Would that our

leaders of today and our people would put into practice the startlingly prophetic teachings contained in [his] writings.”

“Hence we cannot but approve and applaud in principle the desire of many that the writings of Rizal be more widely circulated and read, and even introduced as reading matter in the public and private schools of the nation. We can think of no more effective means, after the formal teaching of religion, to develop in our youth a sane and constructive nationalism, the moral qualities of justice, responsibility and integrity, and the civic virtue, so necessary in our times, of the subordination of individual ambitions to the common good.”

“The most valuable of Rizal’s ideas are contained” in his two novels. But “since there is a widespread impression that these novels are looked upon with disfavor by the Catholic Church as attacking the Catholic faith,” we want to give our views. “The Catholic Church in itself” is never “against the legitimate political and social aspirations of any people.” “Hence it follows that the clear and even forceful expression of such aspirations can never be injurious to the Catholic Church.”

(Leo XIII is quoted to the effect that there cannot be such a conflict. He is also quoted to the effect that the Catholic Church does not condemn) “the desire that one’s nation should be free from foreign rule.” This is suggested by Rizal in *El filibusterismo* in the words of Padre Florentino to the dying Simoun. These “contain the very essence of the Gospel.”

But some say that it was impossible for Rizal not to attack the church since it was so closely bound up with colonial rule. In proof they cite numerous passages of the two novels “in which Catholic beliefs are satirized and the most heinous crimes ascribed to Catholic priests and religious.” “This is a serious charge and we have to investigate it with the utmost care,” since if the novels constitute a serious danger to the faith and morals of our people we would have no choice but reluctantly to forbid them.

Is that true? First, “we must carefully distinguish between certain passages as quoted, interpreted, and employed by the enemies of the Catholic Church, and these same passages as they are in themselves and in proper context.” Even a Scripture passage can be misused if taken from its context. For example, the passage on veneration of saints by Capitan Tiago. “If we read the chapter in its entirety . . . we find that what Rizal is satirizing is not the invocation of saints as such but the abuse of this practice by nominal Catholics like Capitan Tiago.” Not only is this not

attacking Catholicism but Rizal is also following in the footsteps of the Fathers of the church.

(A similar judgment can be passed on the passage on Purgatory.)

We must not let enemies of the church make Rizal out to be an enemy of the church. Rizal himself asserted that it was not the church itself but the abuses he was attacking as may be seen from his letter to a friend, Resurrección Hidalgo (quoted on p. 544).⁶ “This claim is fully confirmed by a careful reading of the novels themselves.”

“Let us then heed the warning of Rizal and not confound the abuses of religion with religion itself.” There were scandals in the church in Rizal’s time. “Why should we deny it?” There were unfaithful priests, like the Apostles Peter and Judas. But that fact does not make Catholic doctrine untrue. However, we must not exaggerate the evil. As to the fact of these evils, “the Church awaits . . . the sober judgment of history.” But the history of that period is only imperfectly known and thus people take fictional narratives like Rizal’s novels as history. Especially with the young, we foresee in the indiscriminate and undirected reading of the novels a danger, since the young are “too apt to take as literally true whatever they see in print.” Moreover, they “cannot be expected to make the necessary distinctions between what the persons in a novel say in conformity with their characters and what the author of the novel says on his own account, between what is said ironically and what is seriously stated; between the condemnation of the individual and the condemnation of the society or organization to which that individual belongs.” (Examples of this are given.)

“Unless these distinctions which the mature and well instructed make almost automatically in the course of their reading are made for the young . . . it is quite likely that Rizal’s works, if assigned as reading matter in our schools, may cause more harm than good. This does not imply any radical defect in the novels”; the same is true of certain books of the Old Testament and some plays of Shakespeare, which “cannot be read by young people without the aid of a competent teacher or editor.”

Hence we judge that Rizal’s novels “not only can but should by all means be made familiar to our students; the editions of them which are assigned as reading matter should be accurate translations of the Spanish text, should be properly annotated by a competent scholar familiar with the ecclesiastical and civil history of Rizal’s period, and should, ordinarily, be commented on and explained by the teacher in charge.”

We call on our Catholic historians and literary critics to prepare such an annotated text as a service to the church. We also need a solid and readable history of the church in the Philippines in English, “written with scrupulous regard for the truth and according to the most exacting standards of modern scholarship.” We are confident that this will show that the religious did not consist only of Padres Dámaso and Salví, but of many like “the wise Padre Fernández and the faithful Padre Florentino.”

In conclusion we say, first, that “we find nothing in [these novels] that constitutes a serious danger to the faith or morals of the mature well-instructed Catholic,” but “much in conformity with the teachings of the Gospel and right reason.” Secondly, “prudence demands that they should not be given as reading matter to the young without proper direction and guidance in the form of annotations to the printed text and explanations by the living teacher. If this prescription of prudence is complied with . . . the salutary political and social ideas of our national hero will strike deep roots in the minds and hearts of our people.”

Propositions of the Draft Letter A

1. Rizal, by universal consent, is first among Filipinos who have distinguished themselves for service to their country.
2. For he possessed to an eminent degree those moral virtues that make up true patriotism.
3. He devoted himself to dispelling the ignorance of his people, raising their moral standards, and combating the injustices and inequality under which they labored.
4. His love for his country did not blame all ills on strangers, but proclaimed that the Filipino people were also victims of their own vices and defects.
5. That is why he could say of the *Noli* that “no one can dispute the objectivity of my narrative.”
6. His devotion to the truth gave him a clear vision. No Filipino before or after him has understood so well or so memorably expressed the moral, political, and social principles upon which the peace and prosperity of our country must be based.
7. We must applaud in principle that the writings of Rizal be more read and even introduced into our schools.

8. Apart from the formal teaching of religion, there is no more effective means to develop in our youth a sane and constructive nationalism; the moral qualities of justice, responsibility, and integrity; and the civic virtue of subordinating individual ambitions to the common good.
9. Rizal declared he did not intend to attack the Catholic Church itself, but the abuses in it.
10. We must not allow the enemies of the Catholic Church to tear texts from their context to imply the opposite.
11. Rizal’s statement is borne out by a critical examination of the novels, according to their nature as fiction.
12. He wrote about fictional crimes of fictional characters, which had a basis in fact.
13. In doing this, Rizal did not attack the Catholic Church itself; rather he did it a service.
14. As to the facts, the church awaits the judgment of history.
15. But since the history of the nineteenth century is imperfectly known, this induces many to take a fictional narrative like Rizal’s novels as a substitute for the facts.
16. This is the main danger we foresee in their indiscriminate and undirected reading, especially by the young, who are apt to take as literally true whatever they see in print.
17. Young people cannot be expected to make the distinctions between what the persons in a novel say in accordance with their character, nor between what is said ironically and seriously stated, between the condemnation of an individual and the condemnation of the organization to which he belongs.
18. Therefore, it is our judgment that, while Rizal’s novels should be made familiar to our students, the editions should be accurate translations from the Spanish text, properly annotated by a scholar familiar with the ecclesiastical and civil history of Rizal’s period, and should ordinarily be commented on and explained by the teacher in charge.
19. There is nothing in the novels that constitutes a danger to the faith and morals of a mature, well-instructed Catholic.
20. Rather, they contain much that is in conformity with the Gospel and right reason, and will serve to develop in our people a wise and generous love of their native land.

Changes in A Introduced in Draft C

From these propositions it is obvious that for De la Costa, as shown in A, Rizal is the national hero not just because he was executed by the Spaniards, nor because he analyzed the problems of the nation with perspicacity, nor because he enunciated political and social principles for the good of the nation. He did all these, but he was also a moral teacher and even a moral example (nos. 2, 3, 6, 8).

In draft C there is a conscious effort to deny to Rizal the moral role, so prominent in draft A, and which played so important a part in his life. He is no longer said to have devoted himself “to raising the moral standards” of his people. His novels are said to develop in the youth “a sane and constructive nationalism” but not “the moral qualities of justice, responsibility, and integrity.” The whole long passage on Rizal’s “unswerving devotion to the truth” is omitted. So too is the quotation from Rizal that had been adduced in support of that characterization, where he insisted on “the objectivity of my narrative” with regard to the *Noli*.

Indeed, a new paragraph is added “to suggest that the affectionate realism with which Rizal regarded his country and his people should characterize our own attitude towards Rizal himself.” “He had his human failings like the rest of us, and while he showed great wisdom and courage in returning to the true Faith before his death, we cannot ignore the fact that he did lapse from that Faith.” “Let us therefore by all means honor Rizal, but for the right reasons: first of all, for his unselfish devotion to this country, and secondly, for the depth of insight with which he examined and analyzed our national problems.” The moral dimension of A is completely omitted as a reason for honoring Rizal, whether in his person or in the teaching he imparted.

Similarly, while repeating the assertion “that no Filipino before or after him has understood so well or so memorably expressed the political and social principles upon which the peace and prosperity of our beloved country must necessarily be based,” the original additional qualification of “moral” principles is pointedly omitted. And so for the rest of the draft, Rizal is purely a political and social reformer, not a moral one. Where A had spoken of “the most valuable of Rizal’s ideas [being] contained in his two novels,” C hastens to limit those ideas to being only “in the political and social order.”

When analyzing the novels as such, A had warned against enemies of the church who by passages “torn violently from the context” use them to “discredit the Church in the Philippines.” As an example it takes the

passage on Capitan Tiago’s veneration of the saints and shows that, rather than attacking this doctrine, the passage seen as a whole is satirizing “not the invocation of saints as such, but the abuse of this practice by nominal Catholics like Capitan Tiago, who distort it into something indistinguishable from superstition.” This is retained in C.

Similarly, A takes the passage in which Rizal is alleged to attack the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, in which “certain sayings of Tasio the Philosopher are quoted as proof.” Analyzing the passage as a whole, it finds that Rizal did not intend to take all that is said there seriously, but rather was “merely using a common enough literary device, that of making a character reveal himself instead of describing him.” Hence “we must seek Rizal’s true meaning by a dispassionate examination of the works themselves.”

C, while retaining the example from Capitan Tiago, omits the one from Tasio the Philosopher, apparently unconvinced by the argument that Rizal is simply using a literary device. There is a single page in the folder, entitled “Objections against Rizal’s novels,” apparently written by someone after reading A. It was probably written informally by a fellow Jesuit whom De la Costa had consulted at home, since it is carelessly typed and without signature. Its few brief paragraphs further support the need for annotations to the text, and suggest that actually this would be a good teaching opportunity for the church. It objects, however, that: “[the novels] portray the friars (with possibly two exceptions) as licentious scamps. The impression given, even to adult readers, is that these friars are representative of the Catholic priesthood.” Another paragraph has a question about Maria Clara’s entrance into the monastery. Those are all the brief comments except for the following, and none of them lead to modifications to the text of A. Only the last of its few paragraphs leads to change. It says: “the pages treating of Purgatory, altho [sic] not necessarily Rizal’s are extremely offensive to Catholics, even to adults.”⁷ It is clear that De la Costa took the advice on Purgatory, and substituted a different brief example, as appears in C.

Whoever was the author of this page, he was not the one responsible for the other changes from A to C, since he does not treat anything but the brief points noted, in which only the one on Purgatory has an effect on C.

Although the claim of A that the satire on Purgatory by Tasio was not meant seriously is dropped, De la Costa rephrases the heart of the matter by a new insertion where he observes that “several of Rizal’s characters in the novels are ‘liberal Catholics’ of the type only too common in the latter part

of the nineteenth century, or Catholics who have lost their faith.” Thus Rizal has them speak according to their fictional personality. “Hence, if Tasio the Philosopher questions the existence of Purgatory, if Don Custodio refuses to believe in the infallibility of the Pope . . . it may reasonably be argued that Rizal is merely making use of the novelist’s right to portray people as they are.” If the novelist were to suggest that these errors were his own opinion, “he would be teaching and not merely portraying error. And as a matter of fact, *we are able to discover no clear example of Rizal doing this in either of his two novels*” (italics added).

Hence C repeats the assertion of A, though changing “it is evident” to “it seems to Us that Rizal makes it sufficiently clear” “that what he wished to attack was not the Catholic Church itself but the abuses and distortions with which her unworthy children adulterated the purity of her principles and practices.” In corroboration, De la Costa repeats the quotation from Rizal’s letter to Hidalgo in A to that effect, and concludes, “This claim is fully confirmed by a careful reading of the novels themselves.”

As in A, De la Costa observes that we must not exaggerate the evils. “Rizal wrote fiction, not history; fiction, moreover, in the lurid style of the Romantic school. We must not then take Padre Dámaso or Padre Salví as representative of the Spanish clergy of this period.” But where A added “Rizal did not intend we should,” this is omitted by C, and two sentences are added to the effect that such social novels give the impression that the evils they depict are typical. “Hence, while admitting that the crimes which Rizal makes his characters commit *may have had* a basis in fact, let us remember that they are, after all, fictional crimes by fictional characters” (italics added). A had said that the crimes *had* a basis in fact.

The rest of C follows A except for two practical matters. To the role of the teacher in A is added the need for a handbook to explain the text. Finally, a new paragraph considers it not advisable that high school students be given the entire text of the novels. Instead, they should be given “an abridged edition . . . adapted to these age levels, [which] contains the essence of Rizal’s thought, and yet [will] not be a scandal to young and tender consciences.”

The question must arise: Were the changes from A to C actually the result (apart from the illustration concerning Purgatory) of a critic suspicious of De la Costa’s appreciative view of Rizal and his novels, or did De la Costa himself, in a change of tactics, temper his enthusiasm in C? In the absence of any evidence positively identifying the presumed critic, it is impossible to

be completely certain. The rewritten passages are surely from De la Costa’s hand, as they blend into the text too neatly to be simply a critic’s suggestion inserted. But the question about the substance of the changes remains.

It is true that some verbal and stylistic changes may have been De la Costa’s own original idea. Thus in the third paragraph of A, Rizal’s love of country is said not to be an “unthinking love,” which in C is changed to “unreflecting love.” But it is hard to believe that he could have written A, clearly done with careful study of the novels as well as of other sources, and then removed so many key passages reflecting his estimation of Rizal and his novels unless he were compelled to do so by an authorized critic. It is thus extremely likely that the episcopal commission that asked De la Costa to write a draft pastoral should have included Cavanna or some other person to work with him as his interlocutor.

This being said, C remains the draft De la Costa submitted to the episcopal commission in 1952. It does not contain all that he had wished to say about Rizal and his novels, but, having apparently accepted that the bishops were not likely to adopt a pastoral letter which held up Rizal as a moral exemplar and extolled his moral teachings, De la Costa apparently contented himself with maintaining that the novels did not attack Catholic teaching if properly understood as novels and commending—with the proper caution of an annotated edition—their reading for those capable of understanding them with the help of a teacher. He was, after all, not expressing his own ideas on Rizal and his novels—he had done that in A—but offering to the bishops who had commissioned him a statement with which he could still agree. It did not say all that he thought of Rizal and his novels, since he had been compelled to omit much. But it did not deny his essentially positive view. He himself would not be the one to sign C, but he could propose it to them as a still positive appreciation of Rizal and his novels.

At this point in 1952 the draft was out of his hands, and apparently remained in the files of the episcopal commission for the next four years. Since De la Costa was out of the country for some weeks before Recto introduced his bill making the reading of the novels obligatory in all schools, as noted above, he did not take any further part in preparing the statement of the bishops which appeared on 21 April 1956. He was evidently dismayed, however, when afterward he saw what had been done to his draft C in the bishops’ “Statement.” For he underlined in green ink in E the passages in C which had been altered or suppressed, and in a printed copy of the

“Statement” from the *Boletín Eclesiástico* ([Philippine Hierarchy] 1956) he underlined the changed passages. It now remains to see what these changes were.

Changes from Draft C to the Bishops’ “Statement”

The six paragraphs (five double-spaced pages) of draft C are taken up as the introduction to the public letter (hereafter “Statement”), giving it an initially positive approach. There are, however, phrases or sentences dropped and others inserted. Examining these omissions and additions, we find a significant trend, although there are some minor changes that are relatively insignificant, or are matters of style. We find, however, for example, that the word “short-sighted,” said of the Spanish colonial government in C, is omitted. Similarly, another reference to the “Spanish colonial administration” is changed to the “colonial administration of his time” (ibid., 1 par. 1 and 2). Presumably this was intended to avoid attracting attention to the Spanish religious orders.

More seriously, there appears a conscious effort not to praise Rizal too highly, even where there is no question of religious matters. Where C had attributed to Rizal “the first place of honor . . . by universal consent,” he was now given “the highest” but dropping the “universal consent” (ibid., par. 1). His “excellent” qualities become simply “great” (ibid., 2 par. 3). And the last remaining attribution of “moral virtues” that comprise patriotism is dropped (ibid., 1 par. 1). His “startlingly prophetic” teachings become merely “patriotic” (ibid., 2 par. 3). Even a quotation from Rizal’s dedication of the *Noli* to his country omits (using an ellipse) his declaration that he proposes “to describe your present state without fear or favor” (ibid., 1 par. 1). Finally, the assertion that “no Filipino before or after him has understood so well or so memorably expressed the political and social principles upon which the peace and prosperity of our beloved country must necessarily be based” is pointedly omitted, even though it is the topic sentence of the paragraph that follows (ibid., 3 par. 3).

Turning from Rizal himself to the novels, there is evident a desire not to grant too much importance to them even when not dealing with religious matters. Where C had spoken of “the most valuable of Rizal’s ideals in the political and social order [being] undoubtedly contained in his two novels,” the “Statement” spoke of “some of his most cogent insights,” and quickly dropped the statement of C regretting the impression that the novels were “looked upon with disfavor by the Catholic Church” (ibid.). Similarly, C had asserted that “in so far as these novels give expression to our people’s

desire for political freedom and a social order based on justice, they have nothing to fear from the Catholic Church” (ibid., 3 par. 4). This last clause is replaced by the tortuous evasion “they are not at variance with the practical applications of Catholic doctrine to the exigencies of the social milieu as it existed at the time” (ibid.). Even so seemingly noncontroversial a statement about the individual’s dignity as a “child of God” is still more tortuously and unintelligibly paraphrased as “one who is adopted by our heavenly Father as a filial participant in His own exalted nature” (ibid.).

After omitting completely the passage in C from *El filibusterismo*, in which Father Florentino gives his program for the redemption of the country to the dying Simoun, said by C to contain “the very essence of the Gospel,” paragraph 5 of the “Statement” ends its appropriation of C with a drastic distortion of its original. Repeating C’s first two sentences to the effect that Rizal intended in the novels to “expose in terms of fictional narrative the actual evils which then afflicted Philippine society,” its change of words entails a quite different view of the novels (ibid., 4 par. 5). For C that “social cancer” was “in [Rizal’s] opinion, largely due to the decadent state of the religious orders and the abuses which had crept into the practice of the Catholic religion.”⁸ With a total change of meaning, the abuses in the practice of religion Rizal opposed becomes not abuses but “some practices of the Catholic religion,” thus laying the foundation for the latter part of the letter in which wholesale condemnations of the novels would be detailed (ibid.). Similarly the following sentence of C is distorted. It had said: “Hence a considerable portion of these novels is devoted to castigating or satirizing bad priests and superstitious observances.” This becomes: “Hence the larger part of these novels is devoted to castigating disedifying priests and to satirizing what he deemed to be superstitious observances and practices of the Church” (ibid., italics added in both sentences). In these two sentences we find the radical differences between De la Costa and Cavanna. Where the former finds Rizal castigating “superstitious observances” (though with vividness, as he will say later in the draft), Cavanna, without even admitting the superstitious observances, finds Rizal rather castigating the “practices of the Church” themselves. The “considerable portion” of the novels is changed to “the larger part,” and the priests are not said to be “bad” but merely “disedifying.”

After this paragraph in its mangled form, the remaining twelve pages of C are dropped in favor of a wholesale condemnation of the novels. Within those pages De la Costa had argued that the novels should be read according

to their character as novels. Hence, if the persons in the novel are liberal Catholics or have lost their faith, it is only right that the opinions they express be taken as what is fitting for such a character to say, and do not express the teaching of the author of the novel. He had added that “we are able to discover no clear example of Rizal doing this,” that is, “suggest that these are his own opinions which he proposed to his readers as true” so as to be “teaching and not merely portraying error.” Thus he concludes that no passage may be found in which Rizal shows that he wishes to attack the church itself rather than the abuses and distortions of her teaching. In support of that conclusion, C quotes in translation Rizal’s letter to Resurrección Hidalgo:

I have unmasked the hypocrisy of those who under the cloak of religion have come amongst us to impoverish and brutalize us. I have distinguished the true religion from the false, from superstitious religion, from the religion that traffics with the Gospel to extract money, to make us believe in nonsense at which the Catholic Church would blush, if it ever came to her knowledge. (Retana 1907, 125–26)

This quotation is omitted by Cavanna, but to counteract its implication he quotes another letter of Rizal’s (this one to Blumentritt, though he does not say so). Cavanna relates that when Trinidad Pardo de Tavera defended Rizal to Fr. Federico Faura from having attacked the church, by saying that in attacking the friars the stone was thrown so high and with such force that it reached religion, Rizal corrected him, saying: “This comparison is not quite exact; I wished to throw the missile against the friars; but as they used the ritual and superstitions of a religion as a shield, I had to get rid of that shield in order to wound the enemy that was hiding behind it” ([Philippine Hierarchy] 1956, 4 par. 6). Cavanna then concludes that Rizal “did attack the shield, that is, not only the superstitions which sometimes, due to ignorance, creep into religious practices, but the ritual itself of the Church, which are sacred acts of Catholic worship” (ibid.). However, Cavanna here quoted (with some minor inaccuracies), not from the original letter, which was in German, but from its translation in the Ozaeta version of Palma’s biography of Rizal, *Pride of the Malay Race*, thus from a translation (ibid., n. 8; Palma 1949b, 115). Moreover, although Ozaeta correctly translated Palma, the latter had neither translated from the German

original nor used the Spanish translation of the *Epistolario Rizalino* (Palma 1949a, 133; Rizal 1938, 523–34, 527–28). Although the fifth volume in which this letter appears was still in press when he completed the biography in 1938, (Palma 1949a, 369), he must have had an advance copy of the Spanish translation (or of the German original, if he knew that language, though the translation accurately reproduces the original). However, in spite of his quotation marks, Palma in fact merely paraphrases the key passage, and dishonestly inserts the words “rituals and superstitions,” which do not occur in either the German or the Spanish translation. What it actually says in the German original is as follows:

I wanted to hit the friars, but since the friars use religion not only as a shield, but also as a weapon, protection, citadel, fortress, armor, etc., I was therefore forced to attack their false and superstitious religion in order to combat the enemy who hid behind this religion. . . . Why should I not attack this religion with all my strength, if it is the prime cause of our sufferings and our tears? The responsibility lies on those who misuse its name. Christ did the same with the religion of his country, which the Pharisees had so misused. (Rizal 1938, 523–24; Schumacher 1973, 152–53)

It is clear that the word “ritual” nowhere appears in the quotation, and hence the argument of the “Statement” is simply false, although its falsification came from Palma rather than Cavanna. Nonetheless, the correct passage is indeed capable of being interpreted to make the novels an attack on the church. However, it deserves to be matched with the quotation contained in C above from the letter to Hidalgo that what Rizal said he attacked were the abuses (Retana 1907, 125–26). The quote from the letter to Blumentritt is likewise capable of being interpreted in the same way as De la Costa saw it, as an attack on the abuses and superstitions of the time, not on the church as such.

Clearly Cavanna chose to interpret it as an attack on the church itself, even apart from being deceived by the tendentious translation of Palma-Ozaeta. For, in an implicit rejection of the assertion of C, denying that there was any passage in the novels where Rizal could be shown to speak in his own person attacking the church, rather than having his characters speak as befitted them, the “Statement” continues in contradiction:

Furthermore, there are passages in the two books where it is not anymore the novels' characters but the author himself who speaks. And among these passages, there are many which are derogatory to Catholic beliefs and practices as such, aside from the criticisms leveled upon unworthy priests. ([Philippine Hierarchy] 1956, 4–5 par. 6)

Cavanna then proceeds to give over 120 references to passages that either “are against Catholic dogma and morals” or “disparage divine worship” or “make light of ecclesiastical discipline.” Evidently he has cast his net wide, since one finds even such items as education in Catholic schools, processions, stole fees, bells, and other matters on which even a devout Catholic might have negative opinions (ibid., 5 par. 7–9). Thus, in effect, he does not allow that in any case the offending statements were intended to portray characters as they were. Basically he is using a different principle than De la Costa, and thus comes to a conclusion totally contradictory to De la Costa's. Rather than there being no conclusive passage in which Rizal attacks the church, there are more than a hundred of varying importance. Two men, both familiar with the novels of Rizal, come to opposite conclusions. It is hard to believe, however, that the conclusion reached in the “Statement” comes from a “serene and impartial reading of the two novels” (ibid., 6 par. 10). On arriving at this point, there was no longer any place for De la Costa's suggestion that annotated editions of the novels be prepared by a scholar familiar with the times. The “Statement” proceeded rather to quote canon law forbidding certain types of books, under whose categories it declared the two novels fell. Only with permission of ecclesiastical authority, “readily granted for justifiable reason” to those with sufficient knowledge of Catholic doctrine, could they be read (ibid.). This part of the “Statement,” as well as some of the minor alterations referred to above, may well not have come from Father Cavanna but from ecclesiastical authority, in this case Abp. Rufino J. Santos, president of the administrative council of the Catholic Welfare Organization over whose signature the “Statement” would eventually be published (Acosta 1973, 74; Cavanna 1983, pt. 3:229). Cavanna's analysis of the novels, however, had laid the foundation for the prohibition.

The rest of the “Statement” dealt with the unreasonableness and injustice of the Senate bill, making it obligatory for Catholic students to read attacks on their faith. Such a law would, under the guise of nationalism, violate “one of the fundamental freedoms of our country, viz., their freedom of conscience” ([Philippine Hierarchy] 1956, 6–8 par. 11–13). It then proceeded to offer to all Filipinos, especially to the law-giving bodies, eleven brief statements

for their guidance. After expressing their veneration for Rizal, the bishops insisted that, although he wrote the novels at a time when he was alienated from the Catholic Church, before his death he retracted whatever he had written against her. That last will of his should be inviolable. “Taking into account Rizal's last will, we must carry out for him what death prevented him from doing, namely, the withdrawal of all his statements against the Catholic faith” (ibid., 9 par. 14, vi).

In answer to the charge that to praise Rizal without taking the trouble to read him was hypocritical, the “Statement” suggested “that a *Rizalian Anthology* be prepared where all the patriotic passages and the social and political philosophy of Rizal . . . be compiled,” not only from the novels but from all the writings of Rizal, and announced that for this purpose “we have already organized a committee which is making the necessary studies” (ibid., par. 14, viii).⁹ The idea of selecting “patriotic passages” from the novels without the students reading them within their historical context or within the genre of a novel indicates how different a perspective from that of De la Costa was behind the “Statement.” The isolating of “patriotic passages” probably came from Cavanna, who is alleged to have said at a symposium on the novels that the *Noli* “was not really patriotic because out of 333 pages only 25 contained patriotic passages while 120 were devoted to anti-Catholic attacks” (Constantino 1971, 245).

In fairness to Cavanna, however, it should be pointed out that De la Costa wrote his drafts in 1951–1952 at a time when no controversy raged and the bill of Recto and Laurel had not yet been introduced with its political subtext. The precise occasion for De la Costa's work is unknown, apart from the fact that it was done at the request of a committee of the bishops (Kennally 1956b). It is likely that it was not requested for a particular occasion, but was a cautionary measure, motivated by the controversy a little over a year earlier concerning the proposal to publish at government expense for compulsory reading in public high schools the Palma-Ozaeta book, *Pride of the Malay Race*, in which, among other tendentiously anti-Catholic passages, Rizal's retraction of Masonry and return to Catholicism was denied, and the Jesuit priests who testified to it were termed frauds. On this occasion the hierarchy published a pastoral letter, dated 6 January 1950, protesting the anti-Catholic measure, and perhaps foresaw that similar attempts to use Rizal as a weapon against the church might be made in the future. This explanation of the occasion for De la Costa's drafts is supported by the fact that, in one of the same folders containing his drafts of the Rizal

letter, there is another typescript entitled, "Some Observations on 'Pride of the Malay Race,'" dated New York, July 1949.¹⁰ Here, while conceding that the fact of Rizal's retraction might not be proved apodictically, he deftly showed the lack of basis in Palma's arguments against it. De la Costa filed his two efforts at studying Rizal and his writings in the same folders.¹¹

Nonetheless, the two approaches to a statement as a whole are dramatically different. Not only is there a different concept of how to read a novel, there is also a different attitude toward Rizal as national hero. There are, moreover, different concepts of the monopoly of the Catholic Church as the only guardian of morality.

Although Cavanna (making some minor use of De la Costa C) surely wrote the larger part of the "Statement," it is probable that the strict prohibition of the novel, as well as perhaps other minor elements, came from Archbishop Santos. As president of the administrative council of the Catholic Welfare Organization, it was he who issued the "Statement," even though it bore no signature. Santos's role is indicated in a letter of Sen. "Soc" Rodrigo to the archbishop, dated the day preceding the issuance of the "Statement." Rodrigo had been, and would be after the "Statement," the principal defender of the church's position in the Senate, bearing the brunt of Recto's relentless and often vicious onslaughts (Acosta 1973, 72–73; Locsin 1956, 2–4; Constantino 1971, 244–46).¹² In his letter Rodrigo (1956) made "this last appeal regarding my suggestion . . . that if the Philippine hierarchy will issue a Pastoral prohibiting the reading of these two books, an exception be made as to editions which contain annotations approved by the Church."

This apparent reference to De la Costa's drafts becomes clear when among the twelve reasons Rodrigo gave in support of his suggestion was no. 12: "Catholic theologians are not unanimous on the outright condemnation of these books. Fr. De la Costa's opinion, several years ago, is fully compatible with allowing footnoted editions" (ibid.). Although Rodrigo's appeal was probably too late to alter the "Statement" in any case, it is clear that, given the latter's tone already discussed, it had little chance of getting a hearing.

Moreover, Santos's communications on the novels had not yet ended. Unlike the pastoral letter of the bishops in 1949 against the imposition of the Palma-Ozaeta book, which was signed by each of the Philippine bishops ([Catholic Hierarchy] 1950), the "Statement" originally contained no signatory; merely its title attributing it to the Philippine hierarchy. This led to considerable confusion when the "Statement" appeared. Recto, among

others, questioned whether the "Statement" really came from the whole Philippine hierarchy, while simultaneously denouncing it as a repudiation of Rizal (Acosta 1973, 73–74; Constantino 1971, 245–46).¹³ No doubt in an effort to establish its authenticity, Rodrigo apparently approached Archbishop Santos for a clarification (Acosta 1973, 74). He received it, but perhaps had not anticipated all that it would contain. The archbishop declared that the "Statement" on the novels "is fully authorized and approved by all members of said hierarchy." (This declaration is still ambiguous. It could be true even if the "Statement" had been drawn up in Manila under the sole direction of Archbishop Santos as president of the administrative council, who then asked the bishops in the provincial dioceses for their authorization and approval by telegram, even without their all having seen the "Statement." In fact, it is improbable that, in the days preceding fax, the "Statement" could have been drawn up with all its details of condemnable passages, approved by the archbishop, and sent to the provinces for a return approval in the time between the introduction of the Recto bill on 4 April and the appearance of the "Statement" on 21 April. One must believe that the "approval" of the bishops was simply a generic prior authorization of a statement to be approved by Archbishop Santos as president. It could then be said in some sense to have been approved by the entire hierarchy, even though it was approved specifically only by Santos. Thus in the subsequent editions of his book, *Rizal's Unfading Glory*, Cavanna, who was in a position to know, simply put down Santos's name as signatory [Acosta 1973, 74; Cavanna 1983, pt. 3:229].)

However, the archbishop went on to say, in a statement directed to those of his archdiocese, not merely that the novels were forbidden by the church. Rather, he emphasized, "without due permission, it is a sin for any Catholic to read these novels in their entirety, or to keep, publish, sell, translate, or communicate the same to others in any form" ([Santos] 1956, 350). This may have caused apprehension among booksellers and librarians especially, but it was too extreme to be effective for most people.¹⁴ In fact, Rodrigo would later say in a private communication to the bishops that, as a result, the novels "sold like hotcakes" (Rodrigo 1957, 6).¹⁵

The senators soon after worked out a compromise, by which a student who would "serve written notice under oath, to the head of the college or university that the reading and study of the . . . unexpurgated edition is contrary to his religion or religious beliefs, said student shall be exempt from using the said edition" (Acosta 1973, 77). Although Acosta considered that this was "a victory for the local Catholic Church," it was in fact a

face-saving compromise, which enabled it to receive the unanimous vote of the Senate, and the signature of Pres. Ramon Magsaysay. Professors who have taught the Rizal course can testify that no student has ever come with such an affidavit (Ocampo 2000, 9). (The following year an effort was made to introduce an amendment removing the impractical provision. It apparently was unsuccessful [Rodrigo 1957, 3, 7], and the proviso continued to be ignored.) Nor did people conceive it to be a sin to read the novels. That is the experience of this writer. Indeed, when I returned to the Philippines to teach the Rizal course in 1965, I just took it for granted that the two novels were to be read as part of the course. By insisting on an outright condemnation, the bishops did not prevent the novels from being read but merely removed the possibility that there would be an annotated edition explaining the possibly offending passages. Even devout Catholics saw no possibility of following the “Statement” and its “clarification” by Archbishop Santos, when faced with a contrary civil law. Indeed, many no doubt shared, in a less erudite way, De la Costa’s evaluation of the novels. Although in retrospect one may perhaps question the practicality of preparing an annotated edition of the novels, a statement such as De la Costa had prepared would have enlightened and satisfied those who cared. Under the term of Archbishop Santos there was not much more tolerance for taking a benign view of Rizal and his novels than under the Spanish civil and religious authorities of the late nineteenth century. Although De la Costa’s role in the “new Propaganda Movement” was not over by any means, it would be in other fields that he would be active, particularly in expounding the social justice teaching of the Catholic Church, and in refuting the alternative Communist program (see, e.g., Iletto 2010, 233–35).

Notes

- 1 This and the other personal documents used in this article, as well as the drafts of De la Costa, are contained in two folders from De la Costa’s papers in my possession, marked “Rizal, Noli and Fili,” which will be deposited with the rest of his papers in the Ateneo de Manila University Archives.
- 2 The identity of “Joe” who signs the letter is established by the letterhead of the College of Liberal Arts, University of the East, where Hernandez was dean. The numerous quotations also show that the writer was thoroughly familiar with the *Noli*, as Hernandez was from writing his book on Rizal. Apparently De la Costa, who had just recently arrived back in Manila from having been abroad in studies since 1945, was not personally acquainted with Hernandez, while Rodrigo and Hernandez were well acquainted from their active participation in the Catholic Action of the Philippines.

- 3 The book was Rizal’s *Unfading Glory: A Documentary History of the Conversion of Dr. Jose Rizal* (Cavanna 1952/1983). I met Father Cavanna in early 1951 after a symposium on Rizal in which I took part, and he had been working on his book for some time prior to that.
- 4 Kennally’s letter (1956a) speaks of having received De la Costa’s letter of 3 April 1956, in which he had sent Kennally a progress report on his work in the United States. He must have been there at least from early March to have thought it necessary to send a progress report at this time.
- 5 At the Second Vatican Council, 1962–1965, Santos was a member of the irreducible negative minority in the face of the progressive direction of the Council, and only with well-known reluctance allowed its practical decrees to be implemented in his archdiocese after he returned from Rome.
- 6 See Schumacher 1973, 75 n. 2.
- 7 It is possible that this critic was Fr. Clarence Martin, a member of the Ateneo de Manila Jesuit community. For after the bishops’ letter was published in 1956, Kennally looked for a copy of De la Costa’s final draft, to contrast it with the published letter, and located one with Martin (Kennally 1956b).
- 8 C’s phrase “the decadent state of the religious orders” is changed to “the decadent state of the religious order” ([Philippine Hierarchy] 1956, 4 par. 6). Although this change of spelling entails a change in meaning, and could be seen as consonant with other changes mentioned here, it probably is simply a misprint, since the document abounds in such.
- 9 This is probably the origin of Father Cavanna’s book, published in 1957, *Rizal and the Philippines of His Days*.
- 10 This was not a draft pastoral letter, but an analysis of the two chapters dealing with the retraction in the Palma-Ozaeta book. Neither does it appear in his bibliography of published works, so it was probably meant for some members of the Knights of Columbus who were involved in the controversy before the bishops wrote their “Joint Statement.”
- 11 Likewise in one of those folders is a letter of 27 Feb. 1953, from Fr. Leo A. Cullum, SJ, editor of the new journal, *Philippine Studies*, rejecting an article of De la Costa, embarrassedly, because De la Costa was associate editor of the journal. From the context, it appears that the article presented unpublished letter(s) of Rizal to Fr. Pablo Pastells, SJ. The editor saw them as “a suave and brilliant presentation of rationalism.” Since there was no possibility of refuting the arguments paragraph by paragraph, he judged it impossible to print them. De la Costa had obtained the letters, missing from the *Epistolario Rizalino*, from the Jesuit archives in Spain. As Cullum (1953) says, “you would not have sent the article if you agreed with me.” The letters would finally be published from De la Costa’s microfilms after his death by Raul J. Bonoan, SJ (1994) in his book, *The Rizal-Pastells Correspondence*. It seems clear that De la Costa was much occupied with Rizal in the years 1949–1952, although he was in doctoral studies at Harvard University till 1951, and then in Europe for much of the following year, microfilming Philippine documents.
- 12 The only other senators who opposed the bill were Decoroso Rosales, brother of Abp. Julio Rosales of Cebu, and Mariano Cuenco, brother of Abp. Jose Ma. Cuenco of Jaro.
- 13 The number of passages condemning the novels alleged by Recto was a gross exaggeration. We have given the correct, sufficiently large, number above.
- 14 However, Abp. Gabriel Reyes, then archbishop of Manila and administrator of Cebu, had earlier issued a similarly drastic prohibition of Palma’s *Biografía de Rizal* for his jurisdictions (Ocampo 2000, 9). This was different from the 1949 statement of the whole hierarchy, which merely protested against the Ozaeta translation being printed at government expense and imposed as reading in the schools.

- 15 It has been impossible to find anything concerning the Rizal bill in the archdiocesan archives. The archivist, Fr. Albert Flores, searched for me any reference to the controversy, but without success. He informed me that there is a large gap in the archives for much of the term of Cardinal Santos (Flores 2011a, 2011b).

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