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## **Rizal and Spain, by Bernard**

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## Book Reviews

RIZAL AND SPAIN. AN ESSAY IN BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT. By Miguel A. Bernad, S. J. Manila: National Book Store, 1986. x. 186 pages.

The documents on Rizal are perhaps the single most often studied and analyzed collection of Philippine historical materials and it is not easy to write something "original" about the national hero. His life and writings are in general well-known to every Filipino, and we have an abundant literature on Rizal, not all of them free of exaggerations and egregious errors.

As the title indicates, Fr. Bernad's book is not a biography, but an attempt to analyze a not unimportant facet of Rizal's life, his relations with Spain. Divided into ten brief chapters, the most important chapter is the ninth, "Rizal's Attitude to Spain." In his well-known lucid style, Fr. Bernad writes: ". . . Rizal did not hate Spain: Rizal loved Spain, but he was disappointed with her policies and political attitude towards the Philippines" (p. 141).

That Rizal did not hate Spain has already been mentioned before. Of the two solutions to the Philippine problem in the late nineteenth century, assimilation and union with Spain was Rizal's preference. In contrast, Marcelo H. del Pilar and, later, Andres Bonifacio, advocated violent revolution as the only efficacious remedy to the colonial crisis. Looking for a model to propose to the Filipino youth, Governor Taft chose Rizal in preference to either Aguinaldo or Bonifacio because of the former's option for a peaceful solution to national problems. Today one of the reasons why leftist writers are trying to depose Rizal from his traditional niche as the principal hero of the Filipinos is his loyalty to Spain.

What, therefore, led to the impression that Rizal hated Spain? His novels and other propaganda writings. Of course, superficially read, these were all diatribes against Spain. But a closer scrutiny shows that Rizal's negative criticism included both the Filipinos and the Spaniards. Rizal certainly knew how to distinguish between the doer and the deed, knew that not all Spaniards were evil monsters, just as not all Filipinos were saintly heroes.

A letter, however, from Rizal's favorite teacher at the Ateneo, Fr. Francisco de Paula Sánchez, S.J., provides a good occasion to look into the matter again. Fr. Sanchez, in Tandag, Surigao when Rizal was executed, learned

about it from a letter (now apparently lost) of Fr. José Vilaclara, S.J., both a former teacher of and one of the Jesuits constantly with Rizal in the Fort Santiago cell until the hero was executed. Fr. Sánchez wrote about the "great joy brought me by your four lines, concerning the precious end of Pepe Rizal." The letter continues with a brief summary of the last years of Rizal revealed to him when Fr. Sánchez "was in Dapitan [and] he spoke to me with great frankness." Rizal went to Europe because of "some pique or something that angered him in the University" and soon lost his Catholic faith. Furthermore, his anger grew from "hatred against the friars" to a hatred that, equipped with real facts, sought vengeance in the *Noli Me Tangere*. Finally, as a natural result of his hatred of the friars, he came to hate Spain, because of the injustices committed by her, as he put it (pp. 7-8).

Was Fr. Sánchez right? Fr. Bernad believes that Fr. Sánchez saw the matter in a "simplistic" (p. 158) way, and that Rizal's problem at the University of Santo Tomas and his departure for Europe were related questions. Unfortunately, no one is sure why the hero left the Philippines. And when Unamuno claimed that racial pride motivated much of Rizal's activities, it was *after* the latter had experienced with a shock not only Spain's backwardness, but also the freedom which everyone enjoyed in peninsular Spain.

I would agree that instead of hatred, Rizal felt frustration, since the government of Spain had apparently shown no "genuine desire to institute reforms" (p. 159). How could a man hate a country under whose colors he volunteered to serve as an army medical officer during the Cuban revolt? And till the end, Rizal had been hoping that men of integrity in the colonial bureaucracy would be convinced of his love for Spain. That is why, on at least two occasions, he refused to escape.

The question now remains: why was Rizal so bitter in his novels? The standard answer is that he wanted to picture an extreme situation in order to rouse his apathetic countrymen; that he was not writing for intellectuals, but for the ordinary unschooled Filipino reader (which, of course, is paradoxical since the ordinary Filipino would not have understood his writing in *Spanish*). Besides, we must bear in mind that Rizal explicitly wrote propaganda, a style of writing which uses exaggeration, half-truth, innuendo, repetition, and appeals to the senses. That Rizal succeeded needs no further elaboration; but that today Rizal is misread is our tragedy.

I wish Fr. Bernad, one of our country's excellent literary critics, had discussed this aspect in this book. In other words, there is a basic need to teach the Filipino reader how to read a novel.

*Rizal and Spain* is a good book and is highly recommended to all those who still do not know Rizal — and they are, unfortunately, legion.

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