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Philippine Higher Education and the Origins of Nationalism

JOHN N. SCHUMACHER, S.J.

To write of higher education and the beginnings of nationalism must seem a paradox to one acquainted with the nationalist literature of the last two decades of the nineteenth century.¹ To say nothing of Rizal's scathing caricatures of the University of Santo Tomas in his *El Filibusterismo*,² Jose Ma. Panganiban's harsh and detailed dissection in *La Solidaridad* of the university education open to Filipinos of the 1880's is only the most systematic of the critiques of Philippine higher education which regularly appeared in the pages of this organ of the Propaganda Movement.³ Even the Ateneo Municipal which Rizal took delight

1. Technically speaking, there was only one university existing in the Philippines during the nineteenth century, the University of Santo Tomas. Under the term higher education, however, we may include likewise those institutions which after 1865 were known as "colegios de segunda enseñanza de primera clase," namely, the Ateneo Municipal and the Colegio de San Juan de Letran. For in the educational system of the time, the secondary education given in these institutions comprised not only what we would consider high school subjects today, but also a number of courses in philosophy and the physical sciences, as well as advanced courses in literature, which would be included in the modern university curriculum. As a matter of fact, the program of the Ateneo Municipal, providing an additional year of studies beyond the official requirements and offering courses of philosophy which duplicated or even went beyond what was required of the ordinary University student, was a source of considerable friction between the two institutions in the 1880s (See Pablo Pastells, S.J., *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús de Filipinas en el siglo XIX* (3 vols.; Barcelona, 1916-1917), I, 423-425). At least after the Normal School was elevated to the rank of Escuela Normal Superior in 1893, it too might be considered in some sense to be an institution of higher education (See its program in Pastells, III, 39).

2. Chapters 13: "La clase de Física," and 27: "El fraile y el filipino."

3. "La Universidad de Manila. Su plan de estudios," *La Solidaridad* I

in contrasting with the other schools of Manila, did not for all that escape the jabs of his pen, for as the Filósofo Tasio drily observed to Don Filipino, it represented progress only because the Philippines was still emerging from the darkness of the Middle Ages.⁴ Later, writing to his Austrian professor friend, Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal would explicate, describing his encounter with his former professors on his return to Manila in 1887.

... Their greatest reproach was the passage in which I had put the Jesuits at the rear of the chariot of progress, they told me that the Jesuits stood in the vanguard of progress. I replied that this could not be, for the Jesuits dare not accept its principles, the liberal principles of progress, etc., for example, freedom of the press, freedom of thought, freedom of religion. Father Faura observed that his Order had many learned scientists; I agreed, but observed in turn that science is not progress itself, but only its material component. It is only the acceptance of its principles which actually constitutes progress . . .⁵

One cannot, of course, take a chapter from a novel, or articles in a newspaper whose principal aim was to counteract the influence of the Friars in Philippine life, as impartial and objective analyses of the state of higher education in late 19th century Philippines. It is likewise true that the latter part of the century was precisely a period when extensive educational reforms were being undertaken; new faculties were added to the University, teacher training was being improved in the normal schools, and considerable expansion of curriculum was taking place in Letran and the Ateneo Municipal.⁶ Perhaps the best testimony that for

(1889), 46—48, 59—60, 86—87. The series was not completed due to the ill-health of Panganiban.

4. *Noli me tángere* (tercera edición; Manila, 1908), pp. 296—297.

5. *Epistolario Rizalino* (Manila, 1930—1938), v, 533—534, 2 February 1890.

6. The faculties of medicine and pharmacy were opened in the University in 1875, the college for notaries in the same year, the faculties of sciences and of philosophy and letters in 1896. The Escuela Normal, opened in 1865, was expanded to an Escuela Normal Superior in 1893. The Ateneo Municipal became a secondary school in 1865, together with Letran, adopting the official program of the Peninsula that year. By the 1880s the Ateneo was giving an additional year of advanced instruction beyond the official program. (Evergisto Bazaco, O.P., *History of Education in the Philippines* [2nd ed.; Manila, 1953] 281—285, 396—401;

all its serious defects Philippine higher education was not far behind, or, under certain respects, was even superior to the general level of higher education in Spain, at least outside Madrid, is the fact that such large numbers of Filipino students were able to move without apparent difficulty from educational institutions at home to those in the Peninsula, and establish honorable records for themselves there. Rizal, of course, would find a great distance between the universities of Germany and Philippine higher education, but the defects of the colonial educational institutions were in large part rather like those of the mother country.

Rather than academic incompetence, it may be suggested, the chief complaint of the young Filipino students against education in their homeland was the narrow limits of orthodoxy imposed on them, the lack of what we would today call academic freedom. This is clearly involved in Rizal's reply to Father Faura cited above. All the evidence tends to show that such complaints were not without considerable justification. Indeed, one argument advanced against those Spaniards who wished the suppression of all higher education in the Philippines was that the existence of truly competent higher education in the Philippines would make it unnecessary for Filipinos to study abroad, where they might be subject to unsettling influences.⁷ Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, it was precisely this supposedly "orthodox" and protective education in the Philippines which did help to make young Filipinos aware of their national identity as well as to prepare them to be able to achieve its recognition.

If the role of the university in society is to be an agent of progress, to be a source of ideas, to enable its students not only to achieve the technical competence to act as doctors, business-

Pablo Fernández, O.P., *Dominicos donde nace el sol* [Barcelona, 1958], pp. 377-379; Pastells, I, 324-325, 423-425; III, 39).

7. Letter of Father Miguel Saderra Matá, S.J., Rector of the Ateneo, to Father Joaquín Sancho, S.J., Procurator in Madrid of the Philippine Jesuits, 28 Octubre 1896, later published in the Madrid newspaper *El Siglo Futuro*, 10 Diciembre 1896. Copy in the Archives of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus, v-2-0/28/1896.

men, scientists, to serve the needs of society, but also to have the understanding and vision to direct that society toward its national goals, in what sense can nineteenth-century Philippine higher education be said to have played a significant role in the society of its time? It is this question which demands an answer here.

The Propaganda Movement of the 1880's and 1890's was the period in which the Filipino people became fully aware that they were not merely Tagalogs, Visayans, and Ilocanos, not merely a people united under a common Spanish colonial rule, but one people with a common destiny of its own. Filipino love of country, of course, did not begin with the late nineteenth century; revolts against Spanish rule had occurred more than once over the centuries, even uniting to some extent peoples of different provinces and linguistic groups — like those of central and northern Luzon in the 1660's and that of 1763 under Diego Silang. But still these remained essentially local revolts provoked by local grievances, and were always put down by Spanish-led troops of Filipinos from other regions. When the Revolution came in 1896, and even more in 1898, it was no longer a local mutiny but a national revolution. That such was possible was the work of the Propaganda Movement of the previous two decades in creating a national consciousness, a sense of being one Filipino people.

This national consciousness, and the Propaganda Movement which was its catalyst, came into being chiefly as the fruit of Philippine institutions of higher education. No doubt that sense of national identity was greatly accentuated by the experiences of the Filipino students abroad, and their desire for liberal and progressive reforms for their own country grew with their experiences there. But the sense of national identity and purpose was already present before any significant number of Filipino students had set foot in Europe. Rather than nationalism being merely the fruit of their European experiences, it was the ideas and desires they had conceived as students in Manila that led them to Europe to be able to pursue their goals further. Our best-documented example of this, of course, is Rizal. Still a

young university student in Manila, he recalled in his *Memorias* how through his studies of literature, science, and philosophy "... the eyes of my intelligence opened a little, and my heart began to cherish nobler sentiments ..."⁸ More explicitly, he noted how in his fifth year at the Ateneo, immersed in these studies, "... my patriotic sentiments had greatly developed ..."⁹

Less explicitly documented, but quite similar effects had appeared even earlier in the *Juventud Escolar Liberal* at the University of Santo Tomas in 1869, counting among its members such links between the protonationalism of Father José Burgos and that of the later Propaganda Movement as Gregorio Sancianco, Mariano Alejandrino, Basilio Teodoro, and Paciano Rizal Mercado.¹⁰ The enemies of Filipino nationalism were not slow to recognize the role of higher education, for as early as 1843 we can find the *Intendente* Juan Manuel de Matta recommending to Governor-General Marcelino Oraá,

... the suppression of the colleges of Santo Tomas, San Jose, and San Juan de Letran of this capital, and the conciliar seminaries of the bishoprics, as perpetual nurseries of corruption, laziness, or subversive ideas, as contrary to the quiet and welfare of the villages as to peninsular interests.¹¹

The role of the university is even clearer in the case of Father José Burgos, Father Mariano Sevilla, and other priests like them who were coming from the University of Santo Tomas in the decade before 1872. It is no coincidence that the first significant assertions of Filipino equality with Spaniards and the first conscious efforts to obtain recognition of Filipino capacities date from this same period when Filipinos, especially Filipino priests, began to frequent the University in relatively large

8. *Escritos de José Rizal*, vol. 1: *Diarios y Memorias* (Manila, 1961), pp. 16–17.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

10. Manuel Artigas y Cuerva, *Los sucesos de 1872* (Manila, 1911), pp. 34–35.

11. Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1898* (Cleveland, 1903–1909), LII, 104–105.

numbers to work for advanced degrees.¹² The surviving writings of Burgos in particular show him a precursor of these ideas which would become a key theme later in the nationalistic writings of Rizal. It is significant then to note the appreciation Burgos showed for the contribution of the University of Santo Tomas by dedicating his doctoral thesis in theology to the Dominican Order for having

... devoted yourselves in the past — and still today — to the training of our youth in the Humanities, in Philosophy, in Jurisprudence, in the Sacred Science . . . Who does not see the great benefits you have brought to the youth of Manila and to all the inhabitants of these Islands? . . .¹³

This dedication was not a mere formality, for even in his anonymous polemical writing against the friars, Burgos did not fail to mention honorably the Dominicans.¹⁴ Moreover, he himself formed part of the *claustró* of the University and was active as an examiner of candidates for degrees in the University right up to a few months before his execution.¹⁵

Practically all the priests executed or exiled in 1872 for their activity in defense of Filipino rights, were alumni of the University. Bishop Juan Aragonés of Nueva Segovia pointed out clearly, if rather negatively, the role of the University in a letter answering Governor Izquierdo's proposal after the Cavite Mutiny that admission to the seminaries be made more difficult:

... It is not the seminaries, your Excellency, from which the worst come; it is from those who study in the University there and the Colleges of Letran and San Jose . . . Every student from Manila who returns to the town of his province is a rebel . . . Just look at where those have studied who took part in the past insurrection; I do not know the facts, but without rashness I dare to assert that all or the great majority must have been students of the University, not of the seminaries. And if in the provinces

12. Numerous indications of this may be found in Fidel Villarroel, O.P., *Father José Burgos, University Student* (Manila, 1971), *passim*.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 71–75. The dedication was made jointly by Burgos and D. Francisco de Marcaida, but Villarroel shows that the composition must be that of Burgos.

14. See the remarks in his *Manifiesto*, in John N. Schumacher, S.J., *Father José Burgos, Priest and Nationalist* (Manila, 1972), pp. 90–91.

15. Villarroel, pp. 96–109.

there is any priest stigmatized as being anti-Spanish, it is one of those who have studied in Manila . . .¹⁶

Similarly, after the outbreak of the Revolution in 1896, we find proposals to limit education to the elementary level, inasmuch as higher education had been responsible for the creation of an educated minority able to lead the mass of the people to rebellion. One such proposal insisted:

We are not partisans of obscurantism . . . but neither are we in favor of carrying education beyond the limits set for their colonies in Asia by other nations, more practical than is ours, and more careful to maintain in their colonies the principle of their sovereignty.¹⁷

No doubt, from the colonialist point of view, it was true that Spain showed herself quite impractical. For this involuntary testimony makes clear why there was a truly national revolution in the Philippines a half century before in any other European colony in Asia. Only in the Philippines was the colonial power so "impractical" as to allow higher education. This was almost wholly the work of the religious orders.

Though the accusation of obscurantism could not doubt be brought against not a few of the religious of the time, their official policy of promoting higher education among Filipinos seems never to have wavered, in spite of the criticisms of those more concerned with preserving Spanish sovereignty than with furthering the education of Filipinos. An eloquent testimony to their pursuit of the latter end, even while recognizing the role higher education could play in the eventual emancipation of the Philippines, may be found in a letter of Jesuit superior Father Juan Ricart to the Father Provincial in Spain. He defended the Jesuit *Escuela Normal* in spite of the expenses and difficulties encountered and in spite of the charge that it would only breed disaffection toward Spain and eventual separation from the

16. Philippine National Archives, Patronato, letter of 7 Mayo 1872.

17. Camilo Millán y Villanueva, *El gran problema de las reformas en Filipinas* (Manila, 1897), p. 35. A similar proposal was made by Eduardo Navarro, O.S.A., *Filipinas: estudio de algunos asuntos de actualidad* (Madrid, 1897), pp. 159-160. See also Pastells, III, 283-285, for Jesuit fears as to the suppression of their schools in 1897.

mother country, as had happened in America. This is, no doubt, an unfortunate possibility, he agreed, but

... whatever may be the lot of these Islands, it will always be a glory for the Society of Jesus to have aided Spain in its praiseworthy purpose of educating and elevating and assimilating these peoples by communicating to them its religion and its language.¹⁸

If it is a fact that Philippine higher education was instrumental in the evolution of Filipino nationalism in the nineteenth century, and that it did provide competent leaders in that time of radical transition in Philippine society, it remains to ask in what way this was done. Surely the Spanish Jesuits and Dominicans who provided that education were not consciously promoting any movement towards Filipino emancipation from Spanish rule; quite the contrary was true, in spite of the accusations made against them by certain Spanish superpatriots. Rizal perhaps saw more clearly than his former professors what the role of their education had been when he wrote to Blumentritt in 1887, speaking of the Filipinos of Madrid, then editing the shortlived predecessor of *La Solidaridad*, *España en Filipinas*.

... These friends are all young men, *criollos*, mestizos, and Malays; but we call ourselves only Filipinos. Almost all were educated by the Jesuits; the Jesuits have truly not wanted to teach us love of country, but they have showed us all that is beautiful and all that is best. Therefore I do not fear discord in our homeland; it is possible, but it can be combatted and prevented.¹⁹

Though unfortunately Rizal showed himself somewhat over-optimistic as to the likelihood of discord among his fellow-nationalists, it would seem that his analysis should be judged correct in its substance. It was not merely the fact of having placed in the hands of Filipino youth the tool of the Spanish language, nor the greater or less competence in technical skills given them that made the educational institutions of Manila forces towards the growth of a nationalist movement, even against the intention of their professors. In spite of their at

18. Letter of 28 Febrero 1881, quoted in Pastells, I, 335.

19. *Epistolario Rizalino*, v, 111, 13 April 1887.

times narrow orthodoxy and exclusivity of outlook — unfortunately so characteristic of nineteenth-century Catholicism, and nowhere more than in the Spanish church, — in spite of the highly chauvinistic and colonialist viewpoint from which they looked at the history of Spain in the Philippines,²⁰ the truly humanistic core of the education received by Rizal and his companions, in literature, science, and philosophy, communicated to them a perspective far wider than the narrow Philippine world, even before they ever stepped on foreign soil. This humanistic perspective created a breadth of mind under which a sense of national identity among the peoples of the world, and a sense of national goals, at least inchoate, could come into existence and grow. To know oneself part of a wider world than that of mere personal experience was to have one's mind opened to new horizons, to become no longer satisfied with the established order, and eventually to look perhaps very far beyond it to an entirely new one. Here Philippine higher education did not fail the Filipino people.

This did not go unrecognized by others among the Filipino nationalists of the time besides Rizal. An anonymous writer in the Revolutionary newspaper, *La República Filipina*, expressed it at some length in a warm, even extravagant, eulogy of the educational work of the Jesuits in December 1898 in the midst of the Malolos Congress. A nation can be free, he wrote, only when in addition to liberal laws, the people possesses, at least in a considerable proportion of the individuals who make it up, moral freedom. This moral freedom of the individual is the fruit of a solid intellectual and moral education, which provides a man with a broad and independent outlook. When such exists.

... in virtue perhaps of the law of unity or harmony, as a man begins to be more or less free morally; that is, as his energy of will begins to

20. See, for one example among many, the semi-official Jesuit publication by Francisco Foradada, S.J., *La soberanía de España en Filipinas* (Barcelona, 1897), a treatise written to show that any emancipation from Spain, then or in the future, was contrary to justice and to God. It was motivated by Jesuit anxiety to disprove the charge that their schools had been responsible for the Revolution.

emancipate itself from foolish fears, low instincts, and crude judgements, he likewise begins to be strongly attracted by a free and expansive organization of civil society. . . .

Let us make a mental comparison between the intellectual movement of the time of our grandfathers and this movement of our own day which is giving life and splendor to Filipino society. We are forced to conclude that the extraordinary change has taken place since the sons of Loyola . . . founded the Ateneo Municipal and the Normal School.²¹

The Jesuit schools, unhampered by the weight of tradition and consequent routine, since they were only founded in the latter half of the century, were more likely to be innovative and to offer stimulation to a society in transition. Hence they attracted more easily the favorable attention of the nationalists, even apart from the reluctance of men whose program was permeated by opposition to the friars to give praise to institutions administered by the friars. Nonetheless, acknowledged or not, the influence of Letran, and particularly of the University, cannot be denied in any assessment of the origins of Filipino nationalism. Burgos and his generation have already been mentioned. But such leading figures of the generation of the Propaganda Movement as Marcelo del Pilar and Mariano Ponce, to name the most prominent, awoke to nationalism as students of these Manila institutions, long before they set foot in Europe. Even more clearly was this true of the thinker of the Revolutionary generation, Apolinario Mabini, whose education was carried on at Letran and Santo Tomas without his ever having set foot in Europe. Mabini's principal biographer has noted the influence of Mabini's scholastic training on his later thinking, far away as he ranged from the way of thought of his professors.²²

But if we may say of the Manila university institutions of the nineteenth century that they built better than they knew in contributing, against their explicit desire, to the awakening of

21. "El Ateneo Municipal," *La República Filipina* 1, 67 (3 Diciembre 1898), 1-2.

22. Cesar Adib Majul, *Apolinario Mabini, Revolutionary* (Manila, 1970), p. 15; also in his *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City, 1957), p. 90.

national consciousness in their students, we must also say, ironically, that it was precisely in their role as *Catholic* institutions of learning that a considerable degree of failure must be laid to their account. To be sure, the anticlerical, and at times even anti-Catholic character of the nationalist movement leading to the Revolution depended on causes in many respects outside the reach of the educator, and had its roots, moreover, in a general alienation of the Catholic Church from the movement of contemporary thought, far wider in extent than the confines of the Philippines. But the gap between the theological and the secular aspects of Catholic education of the time can perhaps be graphically illustrated in the set of apologetic works of the Spanish priest Felix Sardá y Salvany, sent by the Jesuit Superior Father Pablo Pastells to Rizal in his exile in Dapitan, with the expressed hope that they would help him to see the errors into which he had fallen. The courteous but pointed words of Rizal in his reply convey an idea of the disparity between the theological and the humanistic sides of the education of his student days:

... I know from long past the works of Señor Sardá, since I read them in my college days, and in my humble opinion, I consider him the most dexterous polemicist in spreading in a certain class of society the ideas he upholds. Judge then, whether his works will be of great value for me. I say this with reference to the work in itself; as to its source, it would be sufficient even if the volumes were all blank that they should come from your Reverence that I might profess my esteem and appreciation for them.²³

When one knows that the principal work of Sardá was a book entitled *El liberalismo es pecado*, whose thesis was that to profess liberal ideas was a grave sin, indeed the very worst of all heresies, it is not to be wondered at that Rizal should not have been greatly impressed by the religious education of his youth.²⁴

23. *Epistolario Rizalino*, IV, 35, letter of 1 Septiembre 1892.

24. For a description of the anti-Liberal doctrine of Sardá and the Integrist faction within the Spanish Church (including most Spanish Jesuits) he represented, see my article, "Integristism: a Study in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Politico-Religious Thought," *The Catholic Historical Review* 48 (October 1962), 343-364, especially pp. 358-359.

Similarly, perusal of the earnest letters directed by Father Pastells to Rizal in the correspondence of 1892–1893 will be likely to impress the modern Catholic reader, as they apparently did Rizal, more with the affectionate zeal of Pastells to bring his former pupil back to the Church than with the cogency of his theological argumentation.

The letters of the Spanish Jesuits in the Philippines in this period often manifest a rather pathetic perplexity at the frequency with which so many of their better pupils joined Masonry or otherwise gave up the practice of their faith shortly after finishing their studies, not only those who went on to study in Europe, but even those who remained at home. The phenomenon was of course real, and its causes were complex, not least of which was the impossible position which the Spanish clergy let itself be maneuvered into, a position of identifying the maintenance of a colonial regime with the preservation of the Catholic faith. Nor does religious faith, of course, depend wholly on the cogency of the intellectual form in which it is presented; faith is an encounter with God and a commitment of oneself to Him.²⁵ But if a Catholic institution of higher learning is to have any distinctive quality to mark it out, it is that it should be the meeting place of secular learning and theology, that it should give to the student a theological education which comes to grips with the world in which he lives, whose demands his university education is fitting him to meet.

This challenge nineteenth-century Catholic theology everywhere showed only mediocre success in meeting, and especially was this true of the Spanish Church. It is not surprising then that we find this to have been the failure of Philippine higher education, that it was not able to provide an adequate theological

25. It is this point which has been brought out so well by Leon Ma. Guerrero, when treating of the possibility of Rizal having been persuaded by the arguments of Father Vicente Balaguer in his last hours, though he had long since rejected similar arguments presented in more elaborate form in the letters of Pastells. If anything, Balaguer was less cogent than Pastells, but at that time Rizal was differently disposed. See *The First Filipino* (Manila, 1963), pp. 462–471.

framework for the liberal and nationalist aspirations of the growing class of Filipino *ilustrados*, aspirations which, as we have pointed out, it had done much to make possible and to stimulate. It is paradoxical that Philippine higher education of the late 19th century, wholly under Catholic auspices, as well as being directed by those committed to the continuance of Spanish colonial rule, should have been more effective in preparing the way for a triumphant Filipino nationalism than in integrating this vision of an emergent Filipino nation with its Catholic heritage. It was in their function as universities, contributing to helping Filipinos meet the demands of their times, that they succeeded in not discreditable fashion. It was in their role as *Catholic universities* that they were less successful. To neglect neither the one role nor the other is the task of the Catholic university today.