

# philippine studies

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

---

## **Fr. Vicente Balaguer, S.J. and Rizal's Conversion**

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

*Philippine Studies* vol. 42, no. 1 (1994): 110–123

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Fr. Vicente Balaguer, S.J. and Rizal's Conversion

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.



One of the early postwar legal skirmishes in the Philippines centered around a plan obliging college students to read Rizal's *Noli me tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. Dubbed the "Noli-Fili" Law, it aimed at challenging the Filipino youth to strive for the national hero's ideals. Sides immediately formed for and against the projected law. The controversy soon reached its weary end, and the law was passed, despite spirited objections against it. A compromise was approved for Catholic students for whom "expurgated" editions of the novels were published to "save" them from the hero's anti-friar and anti-hispanic barbs.

The perspective of the years provides a more balanced view of the issues. We are in a better position today, to view the controversy. One of the issues in this para-imbroglio was Rizal's retraction of his masonic affiliation and return to the Catholic Church. Unlike the Noli-Fili Law, fortunately, this was a question of fact. Did Rizal retract, or not? Did he die a Roman Catholic, or not? And of course, factual questions must be factually answered.

There is no need to rehearse the whole controversy. In 1952, the Paulist Jesus M<sup>a</sup> Cavanna edited his *Rizal's Unfading Glory. A Documentary History of the Controversy*, marshalling documentary evidence for and against the two views. Received well, the book was edited four times, the last time in 1983. Significantly, Fr. Cavanna wrote:

for those who refuse to see the light, the question is not yet settled. The latest book that revives the controversy, *José Rizal—Médico y Patriota Filipino*, written by Jose Baron Fernandez and edited by Manuel Morato in 1980, without denying the facts . . . obviously calls them to question and, as a last recourse, tries to invalidate them. (Cavanna 1983, part 3: viii)

Baron's *Rizal*, allegedly based on hitherto unused documents, was written to fill a lacuna of about eighty years after the biography written by Retana in 1907 (Baron 1980; Retana 1907). The "unused" documents are apparently those tagged as N° 20.505 in the manuscript section of the National Library in Madrid, and *legajos* 5339 and 5304, exp. 114, *seccion* "Ultramar" of the National Historic Archives, also in Madrid. The documents in the National Library describe, according to Baron, an attempt to assassinate Rizal which Coates had already mentioned and earlier denied by Retana, who certainly had perused the entire dossier on the case (Coates 1968).<sup>1</sup>

Why do we mention this? Because in biographical writing we must make sure of our sources. Otherwise, no matter how well written, all we can offer is fiction. Baron's sources are apparently three leaves written by the same hand, but *not by the same authors*. One was an official note by Juan Sitges, the Politico-Military Commandant of Dapitan when Rizal was exiled there, the others an investigation conducted by a certain Anastasio Adriático. But these were by a different hand from those edited by Retana, and should alert us against the claim that the documents used were either "hitherto unused" or authentic.

Furthermore, the number of factual errors in Baron leads one to conclude that he either did not know the essential facts of Philippine history or had done hardly any painstaking research before writing the book. For example, right at the beginning, Baron mentions Rizal's "birth certificate." His source? Rizal's youthful diary, not the document itself which researchers claim no longer exists! (Retana 1907, 13-14). On another page, Fr. Burgos is still cited as the author of a novel, *La Loba Negra*, a work already proven to be a forgery (Schumacher 1991, 49-61).

It would be tedious and useless to include all of Baron's lapses. The point, however, is that, until now, not all admit that Rizal died a Roman Catholic, and Baron is just the end of a line. Significantly, when the national hero was buried, hardly any voice was heard about his religious orthodoxy. There were three written protests in 1896, 1897, and 1933. The first was an anonymous propaganda pamphlet, the second a letter from Friedrich Stahl, a Manila pharmacist, to Ferdinand Blumentritt, and the third José Alejandrino's *La Senda del Sacrificio* (Manila, Alejandrino 1953). The English translation of José M. Alejandrino appeared ten years before the second revised Spanish edition was published. Close examination shows that these were propaganda pieces uniformly without factual or documen-

tary basis, uniformly passing over in silence existing legal acts attesting to the burial of Rizal's remains in consecrated ground.

Only in 1908 was the first explicit denial voiced:

if Rizal did retract, he might have done it through altruism and not for personal interests. . . . the idol of the Philippines has never changed his ideas; in a word, he has never retracted. (Cavanna 1983 part 2: 6, a statement attributed to Ambrosio Flores)

The debate picks up from there. But it started twelve years after an uncontested tradition in favor of retraction and conversion. Good historical method says one must not blithely ignore traditions.

As far as we know, the following letter has not yet been fully translated into English. It was sent from Spain by Rizal's Jesuit friend, Fr. Vicente Balaguer, missionary pastor in Dapitan when the hero was an exile there.<sup>2</sup> By some historical chance, Balaguer was in Manila when Rizal was in his detention cell in Fort Santiago. He was, then, in a good position to know what he was writing about.

We translate the original text kept in the Archives of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus (Loyola House of Studies, Quezon City). It appeared in *Libertas*, a daily published in defense of the Catholic Church in the Philippines at the turn of the century to counter a well-concerted and well-financed anti-Church movement when the Americans took over the Philippines. It also appeared in the later Jesuit monthly, *Cultura Social I* (1913) 13-19, as well as in Cavanna, III, "Supplement 4," 97-103. This shows how important the document is.

### The Letter

Rev. Pio Pi, Manila

Dear Father in Christ,

In my hands is your brief work, *Dr. Rizal's Christian Death*, (Pi 1909) demolishing Retana's calumny in his *Dr. Rizal's Life and Writings*,<sup>3</sup> and fully proving the sincere conversion and Christian death of this doctor.

Had I known of your plan at the time, I would have written to give Your Reverence some details about that incident. I have personally been involved in it, and I am the best informed witness of the truth of what Your Reverence affirms in writing.

I had a few moments to look over the pages of Retana's book, read the prologue and the resumé or epilogue by Gomez de Laserna and Unamuno.<sup>4</sup> I did not have to read further, for I saw that that book was nothing else but a malicious resort of bigots and masons to claim Rizal as one of the glories of anti-catholic sectarianism. But I had neither foreseen nor thought they would have the temerity to deny the facts that occurred in Rizal's final moments, much less his conversion and retraction.

And even if the arguments adduced by Your Reverence more than suffice to confound them, I do not believe it will be superfluous to bring up my testimony, which is impregnable and will add some details that will confirm it even more.

For some month previously I had been in contact with Dr. Rizal since I was the missionary pastor in Dapitan where he had been exiled.<sup>5</sup> Following instructions I had received from Superiors, I tried to treat him with the greatest respect and affection, to which he reciprocated with affection and confidence in me. He boarded the boat for Manila in September 1896 to proceed to Cuba as a medical officer.<sup>6</sup> I went to Manila in December when Rizal, back from Spain, was in prison and sentenced to death. When he summoned the Jesuit Fathers (this is clear and cannot be denied), he received them with affability. He asked if any of his former teachers were around. Only Fr. [Jose] Vilaclara,<sup>7</sup> they told him, and that providentially I had arrived. Since he had known me as his pastor and friend, he had me summoned. This is why I went there and was involved in these incidents. Neither Retana nor his co-religionists can deny this.

He received me with open arms. Since I liked him very much, I was ready to do whatever I could with divine grace to save his soul. I was aware of his story, but not exactly where he had erred. I can affirm that in the few moments before we started discussing his ideas, he asked to make his confession. I understand that if I had acceded to his request, he would have confessed just as he had often done many times in his youth. But I had to remind him that I believed he was not properly disposed to receive the sacraments of the Church; that we had to talk first about his ideas and errors which, if he held on to them, he ought to retract.

He then began to talk respectfully of God, of the Sacred Heart, of Holy Scripture; that he was praying and asking God to let him know His will in order to carry it out. But since any Protestant could say this, I urged him, despite his desire to confess, to tell me his rule of Faith. Only Holy Scripture, he told me. In this, he was apparently a Protestant.

I then told him I was surprised that a man as talented as he was should appeal to a norm so false and so baseless. With a simple observation, I made him admit the inconsistency of the Protestant rule of Faith.

I pressed him further to tell me his basis for religion and philosophy. As though forced by the power of logical thinking, he admitted to me his

only criterion was reason which God had given as his all-embracing guide. He was indeed a rationalist.

By reminding him of the stupid absurdities of the wisest of men outside of Christianity, it was not hard to make him realize the lack of logic in the rationalist criterion. Here he found himself as though caught in a conflict. He could not maintain the rationalist norm, whose absurdity universal history and everyone's experience show. He was forced to admit the Catholic rule of revelation and the authority of the Church.

There one could see the power of self-love keeping him from acknowledging the Faith he had professed but later abandoned because of the air of disbelief he had breathed in Europe. He kept in mind part of the errors learned from protestant and heretical books, especially from the German rationalist bibles, and we had a long and painful fight.

Admitting Catholic presuppositions, he presented a series of well known objections (already) settled by Theology, which he could not hold in frank discussion. At the end, since there was no time to lose, I pressed the unavoidable intransigence of Catholic truth, with the terrible consequence of being saved or condemned. He was moved when I spoke strongly in God's name and with great zeal for his salvation which I wanted even at the cost of my own life, and tears sprang from his eyes. But still fortified in the last castle of self-love, although unable to demolish the impregnable arguments of the Catholicism—especially those which prove from rational evidence the need for divine revelation and the infallible authority of the Church—he entrenched himself in the idea that reason had been given by God and he could not surrender its natural light to determine his practical conduct.

"We are not talking of abdicating rational norms," I told him, "but of cauterizing reason, since it is very weak and deficient in service of the Faith which is divine and infallible. Reason is not lessened but exalted, raised to the supernatural order." He kept telling me he could not [bring himself to] believe. I answered faith is a divine grace, obtained through prayer. Moved, he then answered, "I promise, Father, that I will ask God to enlighten me and give me the grace of faith."

He backed off and there was no longer any discussion . . . for he clearly saw he no longer professed the Catholic faith. We agreed he could not receive the sacraments without signing a retraction and making a profession of the orthodox faith. He stopped, awaited the formula offered by the Prelate.

This did not arrive until ten o'clock at night. Since he was impatient, I had no time even to read it before showing it to him. I read it, he agreed with it, but noting its length, said he could not sign it, for from its language and style no one would believe it was his. He had already said during the height of our discussion, "Look, Father, I speak of good faith. If I were to consent to what Your Reverence suggests, I would be a hypocrite and offend God."

In the face of the difficulty blocking his signing the formula, I said, "I have brought with me another, briefer and more simple." I began to read it to him, and he said, "You wrote it, please continue to read."

It must be noted that while awaiting the arrival of the first formula, Rizal was already set on signing a retraction and make a profession of faith, which he began to write. But I had to ask him to wait, since he had to accept the proposal from Church authority. He followed spontaneously without in any way suggesting it while I was reading the second formula, and he even added a few phrases which made it more precise and explicit. Only on reaching [the part on] abhorring Masonry which that morning he in no way had admitted did he object against signing these words: "I abhor Masonry as a society condemned by the Church." He gave as his reason that the Masons in London with whom he had had contact and whom he had joined, were good persons, and had said nothing against religion, unlike other Masons whom he had known and were very bad; that he did not think it good to affirm that of all in general, lest those gentlemen in London take offense.<sup>8</sup>

I answered we were not sending his retraction to London, that if they were not bad, they would have no reason for offense. It seemed Rizal wanted to say that Philippine Masonry was not hostile to Catholicism and that the Masons in London did not require him to abjure his faith. This must be true, for Rizal belonged to one of the first degrees.

He asked that it be stated differently. I then explained the purposes of Masonry and the ecclesiastical condemnations, and I suggested adding "I abhor Masonry as an enemy of the Church and condemned by her," and he said, "That I now sign."

The retraction then was expressed as it is worded in your Reverence's work, with the variants Rizal freely and spontaneously inserted, and without any further discussion on the subject of Masonry other than the above.

This is the pure truth, the entire truth of what happened to Rizal. He rested afterwards, sleeping peacefully, as though nothing unusual had happened, to everyone's surprise.

He woke up at 1:00 o'clock, and everything Your Reverence copied from that report published in the Barcelona review, *La Juventud*, took place. I wrote it that very night of 29 December 1896 (Cavanna 1983 part 3, 87-96).

Everything I report I myself witnessed, and some members of the Society of Jesus and Spanish military personnel, all quite worthy of credence.<sup>9</sup> I am not aware anyone of them having disputed this. But strangely the fact of retraction, and the sincere conversion and Christian death are so certain and evident that no one can impugn them with any shadow of support. Mr Retana and someone who pretends to doubt it, show their outstanding bad faith in going about it, guided only by bigoted hatred.

I was the one who assisted Rizal most of that sad day's hours. I argued with him and demolished his arguments. Better than anyone else I can form

an idea of what passed through his soul and what Rizal had been and what he had in mind. I presented to him the formula of retraction, and in my presence he wrote it word for word, revising a few words after some discussion. In my presence he signed it, and I kept and presented it to Your Reverence, who in turn gave it to His Grace, Archbishop Nozaleda (Archbishop of Manila in 1889-1904).

Logically or legally no one can deny or doubt this. Precisely in this case of verifying the final contrition of a criminal, sick or moribund, according to Canon Law, a single witness suffices.<sup>10</sup> This is enough as a complete proof. And here we have not only my testimony, which is of major importance, but that of many others.

There is the one of Fr. Vilaclara who witnessed everything, seated with us at the same table where Rizal was writing, and a multitude of persons who saw and read it (Cavanna 1983 part 1, 105-7 [Engl. tr.]). And over and above all this, I have with me and send to you the original text of the two formulae of retraction given to me, that of Your Reverence and that of the Archbishop, and the first with the variants that were inserted; and another exact copy of what Rizal wrote and signed, although I do not know whose it is or recall by whom it was copied. I even suspect Rizal made that copy himself.

I send all so that you may compare the texts, and see if it is Rizal's. But it does not matter, since there are so many witnesses to the fact, which is evident and well known.

But now that someone has pretended to deny facts beyond controversy, I think it opportune to add at the end of the report, some reflections I wrote down in complete honesty that same night. They are more timely now.

My report goes like this:

Reflections—How did Rizal die? Did he deserve to die? A man with so many admirers on the one hand, and so many enemies on the other, cannot but be a controversial subject, even after his death. There are men who, carried by passion and forgetful of the duties of charity, apparently wish that Rizal should not have died a contrite and repentant Christian in the bosom of the Church and in God's grace.

Only those who assisted him in the chapel can tell better than anyone. Those priests who are the authors of this report are firmly convinced of it and thank God who has poured on Rizal's soul His holy grace to overcome his stubborn obstinacy. His retraction attests to his orthodoxy and his profession of faith, which cannot be more explicit; his act of humility, spontaneous and out of his free will, reading on his knees, and, at nobody's suggestion, the acts of faith, hope, and love before the altar and in the presence of a group of witnesses. The good dispositions of his soul are attested to by the acts of piety he performed especially after midnight after yielding and signing the retraction, the repeated confession of his sins, his devoted recitation of the Psalms and reading of Kempis,<sup>11</sup> the ejaculatory prayers he

repeated as suggested to him. In those hours, he practiced devotion to the Saints, hoped in the Indulgences, on his knees assisted at Mass, prayed the Rosary, wore the blue scapular,<sup>12</sup> pardoned from his heart all his enemies, etc. What more can be asked of a man in such circumstances? What Christians ought to do is thank God for His mercy on this unfortunate sinner and pray for his soul.

But now that I am discussing these things, I cannot resist a great desire to say what I strongly believe about Rizal's spirit, ideas, and feelings. I believe I have more reasons and motives to judge him, since I had been in friendly and trusting relations with him in the last eight or nine months of his life and had assisted him in the chapel.

No one can doubt that in his childhood, while studying at the Ateneo from where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree and until he came to Europe, Rizal was not only a perfect and sincere Catholic, but a devout and exemplary sodalist and secretary of the Marian sodalities. We must note he was of a simple character, talented and open, making him an amiable and understanding [person]. He truly loved the Jesuits, his teachers and superiors. On the other hand, we cannot say his Faith was naive and purely sentimental, and like a childhood impression or feeling, without roots in the mind, as his detractors apparently indicate. He was an intelligent Catholic out of deep conviction. He had studied at the Ateneo de Manila under the solid and logical method of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* and had, besides the Catechism, classes in religion. He had been studying rigorous scholastic philosophy, continually trained in Dialectics, debating and defending in public academic acts its theses with all the rigor of Logic, observing the rules of syllogism and methods of reasoning. This ought to convince anyone and make him see the total force of the arguments in favor of Religion, and profess it with an enlightened faith. To a much greater degree this is to be supposed in Rizal, who was perhaps the most exceptional talent and genius in the Ateneo during his time.

When he arrived at the Peninsula, he continued to be as pious as in his land, visiting our colleges and boarding houses, acquainting himself with the situation of the sodalities. On his way to Madrid, he offered to paint for the sodalists of the College of Zaragoza two pictures of the Immaculate Conception and Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

How did Rizal stumble and lost or pretended to have lost his Faith? Did he go through what usually happens to the young among us? They leave good and pious families after high school to proceed to the university or another special school, and meet rationalist or frankly impious professors, [are] with corrupt companions who boast of being strong spirits, ridicule religious piety, and lead a free, licentious, and scandalous life. In that atmosphere deleterious to honorable sentiments, human respect, evil example, fear of ridicule, occasions of corruption, the burning passions of youth, and

all the surrounding circumstances attract them, charm them, and draw them to follow the example of the rest. One needs heroic valor, real character to resist every hidden danger. There is need for very solid and tested virtue lest one fall prey to such powerful stimulants and efficacious temptations. Piety is cast aside, with all religious observances, and they soon abandon the frequent reception of the sacraments. All this leads, as on a gentle but alluring slope to the shipwreck of honor, good habits which logically makes one forget and later hate that religion, whose moral code is a condemnation beyond appeal, intransigent, frightening of dissolute and disorderly living. This as a general rule, is the student's life.

Of such Holy Scripture says: "They did not want to understand lest they do good" (a paraphrase of *Isaiah* 6: 9-10; *Ps* 36 [35]: 4). They refused to know Christian morality and religion, lest they find themselves forced to live correctly. That relaxation of customs, that free teaching, that atmosphere and bad example are the cause of irreligion seen in many of the young in our centers of learning, once pure angels and models of piety.

This in simple words must have been what happened to Rizal. The young of his caliber risked greater danger of being lost in Spain. They are influenced much more by the Europeans' example and are more inclined to vanity and pride. I believe these two passions destroyed Rizal. I have reason to believe he was not a dissolute person, such that many wondered seeing him cohabit in the last months of his life with a foreign girl.

There was another very influential circumstance that pushed Rizal along those erroneous ways, that is, he and the other young Filipinos became politicians, [themselves] planning or receiving from the Spaniards the plan to free their country from the Spanish yoke and win their independence. This rather strong passion, which got hold of Rizal (who became since then the apostle of the liberation of his country), on the one hand led the filibusters to deal with the Spanish revolutionaries, Morayta and the other masons and enemies of the Church;<sup>13</sup> and on the other consequently, alienated them from Spain which had conquered and kept that country principally through the religious or Catholic spirit, induced them to fight the system of government, [support] freedom of worship, revolutionary doctrines, and political advancement, which are contrary to the Church and her teachings.

Living in that environment and narrowly political atmosphere, Rizal wrote *Noli me tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, where his mind is manifested. Due to personal problems, court cases, and the harassments he suffered, Rizal imbibed the disgust he and his family felt for some members of religious orders and the Guardia civil, revealing, by the same token, the degrading opinion he held of the Spaniards in general. These points served as the bases for his political proselytism. Nonetheless, these works do not breathe that hatred and rancor which constitute the essence of the bigoted writings of our day.

I then believe quite firmly that Rizal's errors and aberrations had been conditioned by the circumstances in which his life unfolded while living in Europe after he had left the Philippines. A serious reflexion explains this perfectly. I am however firmly convinced that, despite his claims of disinterest and of being a free-thinker in that situation, and holding on to this attitude during those years because of pride and personal self-satisfaction, as well as to support his role as savior of his people and arbiter of a political revolution involving all the Filipino liberals and of bad ideas, deep in his heart Rizal was never an irreligious man, a bigot, an enemy of Christ and of His Church. Never in any way did he say or think anything against the concept and the veneration owed to God. His detractors will not affirm this is not true, nor will they cite phrases pointing to this. Rizal debated with Fr. Pastells on matters of faith, but there was never anything else but an intellectual debate in which he sustained errors learned from heterodox books, and without failing in his respect for the person of his opponent, never failing in respect while attacking (see Bonoan 1979).

I am convinced of this from his manner of life in Dapitan. There he lived at some distance from the town, busy with his profession, and under the scrupulous watch of the authorities. Never was he known to conspire against Spain or propagate anti-Christian ideas ( for some details, see Retana 1907, 269-328). Nor was he known, or gave motives for it, as a man of wicked ideas; rather he behaved as a Christian. It was not unusual to see him assist occasionally at High Mass in the parochial church. He used to attend Mass and listen to the sermons there like the other faithful, despite living with the Irish woman, without whom, I think, he would have been at church more frequently and assiduously.

I question: is this typical of a bigot, of an impious man, an enemy of the Church, when so many thousands of Catholics in Spain live without the Mass for years? In my opinion, this proves that Rizal was acting thus without being forced, spontaneously, because his heart and his soul were not hostile to the Christian religion. And because, placed in a condition of exile and free from political ties and the censure of his former comrades, Rizal's Catholic and devout sentiments sprang back to life, for they had never been totally extinguished from his heart.

Another argument that Rizal was never godless or bigoted is the affection he always had for the Jesuits, his former teachers. He never offended them, and even in his novel, he wanted to honor us, although his good intention misled him. But deliberately, no. He treated me with respect, understanding, and love. He granted me as many favors as I had asked, even if they were for the cult. Once I asked him to fix a repository for Holy Week.<sup>14</sup> After an explanation, and seeing I had no means to realize what I wanted, Rizal planned it himself, sketched, and painted it. That year, he attended all the ceremonies. At other times, he asked me to help when he could not attend to the neighbors with serious needs, and I, in turn, helped

him practice his profession. I can vouch that he acted as a real friend, with love and deep trust. This proves, again, that he was not harboring any prejudices against religion, unlike the bigots who hate the Jesuits without any hope of being reconciled to them, and the latter's presence and behavior shrivel their nerves.

I loved him as one of my best friends. An incident occurred which alarmed me, and I prepared to battle Rizal's heterodoxy. They advised me he was feverish and in grave danger of death. Although I usually did not go to his house, I went there and, alone with him, I said, "They say you are gravely sick. Tell me the truth." He looked at me affectionately. "No, Father. Yesterday indeed I was in danger of dying. Today I am better. I shall not die." Then I said, "The thing is, if you die near me, I shall not let you die as a pagan, but as a Christian." At these words, he grabbed my hand, looked me in the eye, and spoke with gratitude, "Thank you, Father. No, no, I shall not die that way." That convinced me that had he died, he would have died a Christian.

In this connection, I very clearly remember that, while in the chapel and the hour of his execution was approaching, I, who suffered extremely because of his impending death, and shed tears thinking his hour was near, told him, "How much better it would have been had you died in Dapitan when sick with fever." And he replied immediately with vehemence in the presence of all, "No, Father, no. It is better that I die now and in this way. For thus I am helped better to die." Are these the words or feelings of a bigot?

Finally, sentenced to death, in the chapel, in the presence of so many witnesses, in those supreme moments of his life, before the Spaniards and newspaper reporters, at that moment, he should have loudly bragged about his anti-Christian and bigoted ideas. And yet, when we arrived, Fr. Vilaclara and I, invited by him to help him, it was as though he had never given up his faith, as though he had forgotten a great part of the years of his life. Immediately on seeing us, he asked to make his confession. Where is Rizal's irreligion here? An impious man condemned to death, we may say, would have held on to his ideas before the world, if by chance someone would have suggested he lay them aside, as happens with so many. But Rizal does not do this. Instead, on hearing his sentence, he immediately calls the Jesuits to assist him in the final stage of his life. Why did he summon them? To debate and win? No, he did not want to argue. He summoned them, as is clear, to make his confession. This is his only request. And will one who is bigoted, or by any shade a criminal immediately ask to go to confession?

Oh, no, he was never bigoted. I hold this as certain. Or, maybe for some time. When he found himself at death's door, he realized his situation, his faith and devotion revived, and he spontaneously ceased being irreligious.

This is evident. Rizal's heart was laid bare, and his attitudes became known, from which spontaneously spring religious sentiments.

And if he, as his heart dictated, did not yield at once, and if there was a debate, it was because I denied him the sacraments until we discussed his errors. And I did it for his own good, namely, that he might die properly convinced, better disposed, and contrite. And I, who debated with him, understood in a scientific and open exchange the last efforts of self-love, I certify that I was led to admire his talent and see the strength of self-love. But I did not see any shadow of sectarian fanaticism, only intellectual errors and prejudices. In the midst of that fight in which he staked his genius, I saw great talent, deep sincerity, solid ground for good faith. When a difficulty was resolved, and a fallacy was unmasked, he immediately admitted and yielded. And it is very true that after that debate, he surrendered nobly, saying, "Father, since faith is God's grace, I promise that the time of life remaining to me I shall spend asking God for the grace of faith."

And he asked for it, all the members of the religious orders and the good Manila Christians asked for it. God listened to so many groans and prayers, and gave Rizal the gift of piety and faith. I can certify with an oath that, loving God, Rizal died a devout, holy, Christian death blessed by God. With His grace I hope to see him in heaven.

Yes, my dear Father, I can affirm with full certainty and Your Reverence tell all the Manila Christians and that entire country, that Rizal was never irreligious or bigoted, never an enemy of the Church; that he was a young man waylaid for some time by factors around him; that he was a good patriot, and desired in good faith the welfare and the independence of his country; that he confessed to me in the chapel that he had never approved armed revolution; that he had hoped to win autonomy and later independence through legal means. But deep in his heart, he was in the beginning and at the end of his life a good Christian. Let them honor the memory of Rizal, a good Christian at heart, the first hero of the Philippines.

(Sgd.) Vicente Balaguer, SJ.

Tarrazona, 21 July 1910

## 3

## Notes

1. Otherwise well-written, Coates claims Fr. Balaguer fabricated the story of Rizal's conversion. No documentary evidence is provided, and one can also say Coates "fabricated" the very charge he lays on Balaguer.

2. Fr. Balaguer was born in Alcoy, Alicante, Spain on 19 January 1851, entered the Society of Jesus on 30 July 1890, and came to the Philippines in 1894. His first missionary assignment was in Surigao, but in 1896, he was transferred to Dapitan. A year later, he was in Davao. While waiting for peace to return, after the Bonifacio uprising and the defeat of the Spanish fleet off Cavite in 1898, he founded the catechetical center in Tondo, Manila. He returned to Spain in 1899, and died in Orihuela on 1 October 1922.

3. Fr. Balaguer is mistaken here. In his biography of Rizal cited above, pp. 415-27, which is mainly a series of quotations from Fr. Pi's work (1909), Retana admits Rizal's

conversion and retraction. Fr. Balaguer probably refers to Retana's article, "La Conversión de Rizal," *El Renacimiento* VIII, 96 (29 December 1908), 4, where the latter denies Rizal was converted out of conviction but only because of emotion or feeling. For an English excerpt, see Cavanna (1983, Part 3: 10-14).

4. Javier Gómez de la Serna, who wrote the prologue to Retana's biography of Rizal had been in the Philippines, and was a deputy to the Spanish Congress at the beginning of the twentieth century. He claimed he knew the national hero personally in Madrid: "Neat, spoke with an accent, pensive and unhappy face; voice always modulated, no uncouth shouts or guffaws; little given to entertainment and trifling pastimes. . . ." (Retana 1907, viii). — Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) was probably the most influential figure of the "Generation of '98," the group of thinkers and writers in Spain who tried to analyze why a country, who had ruled an extensive dominion where the sun had never set, had lost all her colonies. Although younger than Rizal, he had known the latter at the Central University of Madrid, and had studied Greek under the same professor. Fr. Balaguer's negative opinion is perhaps due to what Unamuno a bit superciliously writes in the epilogue to Retana's work: "Entre nosotros, los españoles, apenas hay idea de lo que el protestantismo es y significa, y el clero católico es de lo mas ignorante al respecto." And of the relations between Rizal and the Jesuits Unamuno could have been a little less insulting, adding that fewer things could be more instructive: ". . . se ve la irremediable vulgaridad y remplonería del jesuita español, con sus sabios de guardarropa, con sus sabios diligentes y útiles mientras se trata de recoger, clasificar y exponer noticias, pero incapacitados por su educación de elevarse a una concepción verdaderamente filosófica de las cosas." (Retana 1907, 492, 495).

5. See note 2 above.

6. Fr. Balaguer is mistaken here. On 19 December 1895, Rizal, following Blumentritt's suggestion, volunteered to serve as a medical officer in the Spanish army at the Cuban front. His offer was accepted and he left Dapitan at midnight of 31 July 1896, arriving in Manila the following 6 August, a day after the monthly mail to Spain had sailed away. The Bonifacio uprising erupted a few weeks later, while Rizal was being kept incomunicado aboard *Castilla* idling off Cavite, not in Manila Bay. See "Memorias y Diarios" (1953, 22-30).

7. Born in Artes, Barcelona, Spain on 27 November 1840, entered the Society of Jesus on 4 October 1862, and came to the Philippines in 1874. At the Ateneo, he was successively Prefect of Studies, professor of Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics, Physics, Chemistry, and Director of the Manila Observatory. In 1877, after Rizal's graduation, he was assigned to Dapitan, but was recalled to the Ateneo in 1890. Assigned again to the Mindanao missions, he was recalled to Manila around the time of Rizal's trial and imprisonment. He sailed for Spain because of ill health on 2 September 1897, but died at sea off Aden sixteen days later.

8. Contrary to popular impression, international masonry is not homogeneous. In 1849, the Grand Orient of France declared in its new constitution that masonry was a philanthropic, philosophical, and progressive institution based on faith in God and belief in the immortality of the soul. But some lodges in southern Europe deleted the traditional oath "To the glory of the Grand Architect of the Universe." In 1877, the Grand Orient of France cancelled from its statutes the obligation to believe in God and in the immortality of the soul. This scandalized other masons worldwide, especially the North American and English rites which broke ties with the Grand Orient of France. For a brief summary of the post-Vatican II relations between the Roman Catholic Church and freemasonry, see Ferrer-Benimeli and Caprile (1982) and the bibliography suggested there.

9. For their names and corresponding statements, see Cavanna (1983, *passim*).
10. Best-exemplified in death-bed confessions.
11. A devotional book popular through the ages because the simple spirituality it offers is easy to put into practice. It appeared after the dogmatic pronouncement on the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, the same age which produced the immortal hymn, "*Adoro te devote*." Authorship is attributed to the Italian Giovanni Gessen, or Gersen (fl. 13th cent.), or the French Jean le Charlier or Gerson (chancellor of Sorbonne), or the German Thomas Haemmerchen (or Kempen), and finally to the Dutch Gerard Groote, apostle of Deventer and famous preacher and reformer in the second half of the thirteenth century. Groote is known also as the initiator of the "*Devotio Moderna*" which occasioned the religious societies known as the Brothers, and Sisters, of the Common Life.
12. One of the external symbols of membership in the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a pious association aiming at self-sanctification. Rizal belonged to the Sodality of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the saint chosen as the secondary patron of the students' Sodality at the Ateneo.
13. Miguel Morayta, the Grand Orient of Spanish masonry in Rizal's time. The literature on Spanish masonry is extensive, but to start, see *La Masonería Española*, 1728-1939 (Alicante 1991). For a brief summary of Morayta's influence on Rizal and Filipino nationalism, see Schumacher (1991, 175-76).
14. During Holy Thursday, the Blessed Sacrament is removed from its usual place in the church and transferred to a special place of honor, or "repository," to allow the faithful to worship it in a special way on this day.

## References

- Alejandrino, Jose. 1953. *La Senda del Sacrificio*. Manila.
- Baron Fernandez, Jose. 1980. *Filipino doctor and patriot*. Translated by Lilia Hidalgo-Laurel. Manila.
- Bonoan, S.J., Raul. 1979. The Pastells-Rizal correspondence. Ph.D. diss., Loyola House of Studies.
- Cavanna y Manso, Jesus Ma. C.M. 1983. *Rizal's unfading glory: A documentary history of the conversion of Dr. Jose Rizal*. Manila.
- Coates, Austin. 1968. *Rizal, Philippine nationalist and martyr*. Hongkong.
- Ferrer-Benimeli, Jose A. and Giovanni Caprile. 1982. *Massoneria e Chiesa Cattolica, ieri, Oggi e Domani*. Rome.
- Memorias y Diarios. 1953. *Documentos Rizalinos Regalados por el Pueblo Español al Pueblo Filipino*. Manila.
- Pi, S.J., Pio. 1909. *La Muerte Cristiana del Doctor Jose Rizal*. Manila.
- Retana, Wenceslao E. 1907. *Vida y Escritos del Dr. Jose Rizal*. Madrid.
- Schumacher, S.J., John. 1991. The authenticity of the writings attributed to Father Jose Burgos. Chap. in *The making of a nation: Essays on nineteenth-century Filipino nationalism*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. Filipino masonry in Madrid. Chap. in *The making of a nation: Essays in nineteenth-century Filipino Nationalism*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.