

The Franciscans In The Writings Of Dr. Jose Rizal

Dr. Jose Rizal is the official national hero of the Philippines. While it is true that his life has been studied from the many angles of his writings and ideas, there are still some interesting aspects that have not been analyzed, aspects that may not be of primary concern but important nonetheless, to understand his creative personality. The fact that he is considered a "sacred person" seems to prevent anyone to delve deeper into some aspects that may cast light on the background of some of his works.

To grasp the depths of Rizal's writings, a slow, accurate reading is needed. The perceptive reader feels Rizal was ninety-nine percent conscious of what he was doing as part of his destiny in building the national identity of the Filipinos. Rizal, moreover, is a multifarious personality, and thus one cannot affirm, in one sweeping statement: This was Rizal. The magnitude of his work is spread all along his novels, diaries, poems, etc. and all the time, the person is involved in various ways and levels.

In his two novels, *NOLI ME TANGERE* and *EL FILIBUSTERISMO*, one notes Rizal's descriptive power and sociological perception as a writer. A question that may strike his curious mind would be why Dr. Jose Rizal used the Franciscans in his novels. This study, precisely, would like to answer this question. Though this work is not meant as a documentation of Franciscanism in Rizal's approach, it has some merits because of its

peculiar context. Employing from the very beginning the framework of the *NOLI* and the *FILI*, it will be easy to follow Rizal dressed in a Franciscan habit as he aims to present a key idea of his total message, through the figure of Father Damaso, a Franciscan friar, who though not the main character, still carries with him an important part in the development of the novel's entire theme.

This study uses the novels in their original language, and in the peculiar style and mentality of the nineteenth century. Using the background of a colonial Manila, and his romantic feelings as a writer (which do not conflict with his European experience and bohemian taste) Rizal exhorts the Spaniards about what should be done in the Philippines, a colony far away from Madrid. Though he wrote in Spanish and intended his message for Spanish readers, not aware of the cancer that was developing in the country, his message is psychologically Filipino. And he wrote for those who, upon reading his works, might do something to cure the malady.

Rizal, moreover, wrote at a time when the Franciscans were ending another important chapter in their evangelical presence among the Filipinos. A few years after, in fact, with the end of the Spanish presence in the Philippines, many of these Franciscans were forced to leave,¹ but not without leaving behind a simple, silent, and appreciative people. The Filipinos knew the Franciscans as religious men of the Lord, as missionaries, parish priests, and faithful companions from the very beginning of the foundation of the Filipino town up to the moment when the ferment of the new ideas of liberalism, and anti-friar propaganda distorted the truth and facts under the excuse of building what may be called "National Identity". History may be written with the ruthlessness of events, and manipulated facts may create an artificial image, but not at the expense of destroying what was genuine and built with the strong and sincere faith that brought the missionaries to this beautiful land. This year, the Franciscans celebrate their four hundred years in the Philippines — 1578-

¹ Pastrana, Apolinar, OFM, *Franciscanos Españoles Repatriados con motivo de la Revolución Filipina*, 1898, *Archivo Ibero Franciscano*, Madrid, 1975 año XXXV, Nums. 137 and 138, p. 157.

1978 — a lot of time indeed that cannot simply be ignored with a mere shrug of the shoulder.

DR. JOSE RIZAL'S NOVELS

Dr. Jose Rizal published his novels in Europe. *Noli Me Tangere* came off the press in Berlin, 1887; *El Filibusterismo* in Ghent, 1891. As he himself stated, these works present for the first time an impartial view of the life of the Tagalog people,² though no serious historian would agree on this. At any rate, Dr. Rizal presented his whole thesis in two companion pieces under the title, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, and although there was a gap of four years between the two novels a sequence in the argument can be discerned. The first novel, extremely critical about the social and political conditions during that time, can be considered complete in itself. The second sounds more like a "revolutionary speech" as evidenced in Fr. Florentino's statements, a native priest in the novel. In other words, these novels attempt to reflect the Filipino life within the span of ten years, with a message that has to be understood within the framework of the Filipino situation then as a Spanish colony. It is a passionate presentation with social undertones and political malice.

Not meant to be anti-Spanish, Rizal's novels are rather anti-government and anti-colonial, and as such implicate the Church in the entire Philippine situation. In principle, Rizal did not see the presence of Spain in the Philippines as incompatible if only his claims for reforms which he and many other "ilustrados"³ worked for were fulfilled.⁴ His was the cry of legitimate aspira-

² Molina, Antonio, *The Philippines Through the Centuries*, (2 vols.) Vol. II, Manila, 1961, p. 143.

³ *Ilustrados* — educated Filipinos who studied here and abroad and were influenced by the liberalism of the 19th century. Some of them got involved in the Fil-Spanish revolution.

⁴ Ponce, Mariano, *Cartas sobre la Revolución 1897-1900*, Teodoro Kalaw, ed., Manila, Philippines, 1935. The stronger and better equipped group to ask for political reforms in the Philippines moved around the publication of *La Solidaridad*, a democratic fortnightly published in Barcelona, Spain which began on February 15, 1889 and lasted up to November 15, 1893. "Modest, very modest indeed are our aspirations. Our program aside from being harmless is very simple; to fight all reaction, to hinder all steps backward, to applaud and to accept all liberal ideas, and to defend progress; in brief, to be a propagandist above all of the ideals of democracy so that these might

tions for the people. The social ulcer is masterfully described within its literary context, thus, giving the impression that the whole Filipino life was such. But Rizal did not write history nor the history of his people; what he did was to color certain facts with the stroke of his literary brush. Rizal's main objective was to present his ideas or preconceived ideology within the urgency of analyzing the situation. He therefore used incidents, manipulating his literary skill, to touch the readers with passion, sympathy and sentimentalism.

From the very beginning, the reader may see that Rizal did not write for the sake of writing. He knew what his goal and objectives were: his novels had well-conceived plots⁵ although each chapter can be considered as a separate unit. The genesis of his novels may be traced within the Propaganda Movement, a product of study clubs of Filipinos in Madrid and Barcelona, when the liberal air of the latter part of the 19th century made travel and study of Filipinos possible in the Metropolis. While most of his colleagues talked in the streets and wrote in newspapers and periodicals, advocating a better life in the Philippine colony, Rizal went much further. He urged a peaceful way of attaining these reforms without the revolutionary smoke of the moment. Moreover, he wrote his novels with the solidity of a serious study and the perceptive analysis of a socio-political situation camouflaged by a fictional framework.

Similar to all novels of well-developed plots, Rizal's message is incarnated in the different characters who exhibit various levels of attraction and sympathy. These fictional characters do not assume the normal pattern of growth because they are always exaggerated and satirized. They do not fit the realistic life of monotony and boredom,⁶ even as we consider the writer's effort to place them within the reality of his description. It may be said that each one of the characters is a manifestation of Rizal himself, under various aspects of his way of thinking.

reign over all nations here and beyond the seas." *La Solidaridad*, I, Num. I, editorial.

⁵ Radaic, Ante, *José Rizal Romántico y Realista*, Manila, UST Press, 1961, p. 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

The novels' whole plot centers around Maria Clara, symbol of the Philippines, and the endeavours of Ibarra-Simoun-Elias, Rizal's exact personification of himself and his ideas.⁷ Like a physician, with his pen, he tries to forecast the Philippines' social malady. And to express it, he adds new characters to the already abundant list in order to strengthen the realism of his description without falling into some kind of contradiction. However, we cannot still classify his novels as social novels. Perhaps they are social in the sense that they contain the dirty linen of the social environment where Rizal situated his plot. This is why it treats of folklore and customs but without roots or foundations on sociological theories. Sometimes, some of the secondary characters in his novels give the impression of being more important than they are supposed to be. This may be a literary merit on the part of the writer but certainly the exaggeration can sometimes convince or deceive. Among these secondary characters is a Franciscan friar named Padre Damaso Verdalongas, alias Garrote,⁸ the character this study wants to discuss. He is a striking character from the very beginning, in such a way that after reading the whole book, he is almost the only character that lingers in the reader's mind as an after effect of anti-friar remarks that Rizal made in handling this rude, but in many ways, sympathetic character. In Rizal's mind, his novels have an anti-ecclesiastical air without exactly intending to persecute the Church. And this is so not because of the Church itself; rather, his novels were used to obtain his objectives.

But Rizal could not write about what he wrote without bumping against the presence of the Church in any of the various aspects of Philippine History. This holds true not only for Rizal, but also for any of the exponents of the Propaganda Movement. The Church in the Philippines was like a nightmare that had to be cleaned and if necessary, destroyed, in order to give a new start to the future of the Philippines. Rizal dressed one of his characters in the Franciscan habit in line with a very popular

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸ Garrote in this case may be the Spanish term for "cane". In their fantasy and vivid imagination, the people at that time nicknamed Fr. Damaso as "Garrote" because he used to intervene with his cane to preserve peace and order in the town.

aspect of the Filipino life during these days: the "fraile-cura"⁹ of the town, spicing him up with all the colorful legends around his figure and influence in the town's life. This is where Fr. Damaso, a Spanish Franciscan friar and parish priest of San Diego, comes into the picture. As a character in the novel, he was used by Rizal to interweave with Maria Clara's destiny. And as for the town itself, it could be any of these towns in the provinces close to Manila.

Before going into more details, let it be clear that both the main and the secondary characters in the novels are Rizal himself incarnated, expressing through them his anti-ecclesiastical, anti-government and anti-colonial feelings. It is very interesting to observe that all the young characters in Rizal's writings ended in a tragic way; and the elder, mature ones did not end at all, so to speak, but rather, they disappeared from the stage undeveloped and without solution. Could it be that Rizal was psychologically marked by destiny and by his tragic end under the firing squad of the colonial power, and at the same time, the inexperience to develop the old characters was because he was out of touch from a life that he had not yet lived? He was not a popular revolutionary demagogue; his ideas escaped the understanding of the Filipino masses of his time.¹⁰ This may induce us to foresee that if it were not for the "fate of his life", Rizal would never have been a strong attraction to the Filipino people, no matter how brilliant his ideas might have been for the pursuit of freedom. Moreover, Rizal did not write for the masses. His style, though of his time, was very personal and limited to the bohemian level. His ideology was one that might not improve the social situation except in causing some dusty comments which are far from being translated into tangible reforms. It was Graciano Lopez-Jaena who wrote Rizal that his novels did not solve the problem and even if he added to the novel chapter after chapter without end, no further solution could be had save for the morose pleasure of

⁹ *Fraile-cura* — a term which literally means "friar-parish priest". This was the popular name for the parish priest or pastor of the town since most of the towns were under the care and administration of the friars.

¹⁰ Radaic, Ante, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

an accurate remark.¹¹ Rizal certainly had no revolutionary intent; rather, he was for reform.

THE FRANCISCANS AND RIZAL

Undoubtedly, Dr. Rizal did not have any special contact with the Franciscans in the Philippines. He studied under the Jesuits and the Dominicans. Calamba, Laguna, his hometown, though evangelized and administered by the Franciscans, was by 1632, under independent ministers.¹² When exactly it was given up by the Franciscans is still unknown but certainly, it must have been many years ahead of Rizal. It should be cited though that the province of Laguna, the present Rizal province as well as Quezon province, formerly Tayabas, were the areas assigned to the Franciscans for evangelization and pastoral administration.¹³ Besides, the framework used in Rizal's novels falls within the environment of these surrounding provinces of Manila, where the Franciscans were indisputably the popular friars running the parochial affairs with the people's sympathy and approval.

It is only after examining the various places Rizal cited in his works that one may stumble into some Franciscan friars. Perhaps a nearby place and opportunity for Rizal to see the Franciscans could be San Francisco de Intramuros, the walled city of Manila during his studies in Manila. Whether he did this purposely, cannot be affirmed with supporting records. Some historical detail, however, indicated that there is no mention of Franciscan presence during Rizal's last hours; not even during the execution by the firing squad, and this is due to the expressed will of the Franciscan Superior of Intramuros, who ordered his friars to keep out from what was going on. There are no written documents to prove this other historical human incident but according to the tradition held among Franciscans, when Rizal was on his way to be executed, he requested to thank the Fran-

¹¹ Letter from Graciano Lopez Jaena to Rizal on October 2, 1891 in Barcelona, Spain, which was published in the writings of Jose Rizal.

¹² Prieto, José, OFM, *Pueblos fundados y administrados por los Franciscanos en Filipinas*, Manila, 1937.

¹³ Huerta, Felix, *ESTADO Geográfico, Topográfico, Estadístico, Histórico — Religioso de la Santa y Apostólica Provincia de S. Gregorio Magno de Religiosos Menores Descalzos de la Regular y Más Estrecha Observancia de N.S.P.S.S. Francisco, en las Islas Filipinas*, Binondo, 1865.

ciscan Superior of Intramuros, for his diplomatic gesture of not allowing his friars to witness the tragic death that was going to take place on that morning of December 30, 1896.¹⁴ Another possible point of contact between Rizal and the Franciscans could be through the Franciscan topic in Literature and Art, so frequently used by writers and artists in their inspired moments. But even here, this argument is too weak to support such theory. After all, Rizal's writings does not really project the Franciscan spirit so well grasped by thousands of others in their literary and artistic outbursts. Furthermore, the epic of Philippine evangelization is not an exclusive work of the Franciscans.

Searching further for valid reasons why Rizal used the Franciscans in his novels, one could be found in *El Filibusterismo*. There, he mentioned a certain character called "Tandang Basio Macunat". This is the title of a novel which was published in Manila, in 1885, and written by the Franciscan friar, Fr. Miguel Lucio Bustamante.¹⁵ If it is taken from the point of view of the native *ilustrado*, the book's theme is certainly anti-Filipino. The simple and peaceful rural life in this work is contrasted with the sophisticated city and educated life of the *ilustrado*. The novel also pointed out how necessary it is to keep the native in his rural ignorance under the paternal protection of the friar, and with the native's sole concern for his farm, his carabao (Philippine Buffalo) and his townfolks. W. Retana, a great writer of Philippine history, also strongly criticized this book.¹⁶ This book's publication, so to speak, was a sharp blade thrust against the friars and their presence in the Islands. For instance, the *ilustrados* took this as an opportunity to attack the friars and spread it outside the restless circles of the *Liga Filipina*.¹⁷ Certainly, the book was negative and the critical approach could be more educational if

¹⁴ Abad, Antolin, OFM, "Los Franciscanos en Filipinas," *Revista de Indias*, Num. 97-98, Julio-Diciembre, 1965, p. 439.

¹⁵ *Tandang Basio Macunat* by Fr. Miguel Lucio Bustamante, OFM, Manila, 1885. It is a short novel in Tagalog with didactic intentions. Fr. Bustamante was a Franciscan friar of the late 19th century who was an expert in Tagalog linguistics. He also wrote short commentaries on the religious life and on Filipino customs.

¹⁶ Retana, Wenceslao E., *Vida y Escritos del Dr. Jose Rizal*, Ed. Ilustrada con fotografías. Prólogo y epílogo de J. Gómez de la Serna y Miguel de Unamuno. Manila. 1907.

¹⁷ *La Liga Filipina* — an organization founded by Jose Rizal on July 7, 1892 with political features.

only it were written more objectively. It is from this standpoint that some would like to see Rizal as answering the argument of Fr. Lucio Bustamante, using the Franciscans in his fictitious writings as a way of literary retaliation, as he likewise did in more specific terms in answering the aggressive pamphlet of another Augustinian friar, Fr. Lorenzo. Though there is not enough supporting evidence, this could be one of the reasons why Rizal used the Franciscans in his novels.

On the other hand, it does not need a laborious historical effort to perceive the evidence of Franciscan influence, not only during the time of Rizal, but from the very beginning of the Franciscan arrival in the Philippines in 1578.¹⁸ The Franciscans have to be considered indispensable pillars in the making of Philippine history through their evangelical commitment as well as their social and cultural endeavors. It will not be bragging too much in affirming that the Franciscans have always sought to protect and fight for the rights and values of the Filipino people, way back from the days of Fr. Juan de Plasencia¹⁹ up to the time of Fr. Felix Huerta.²⁰ Together with the Filipino people, they share the historical epic of the Hispanic-Philippine history.²¹

¹⁸ Perez, Lorenzo, OFM, "Origen de las Misiones Franciscanas en el Extremo Oriente", Extracto de la Revista *Archivo Ibero-Americano*, Vol. VI, 1916, Madrid, España. The article proved authoritatively that the Franciscans arrived in 1578 and not in 1577 as earlier asserted.

Vide Isacio Rodriguez, OSA., *Historia de la Provincia Agustiniiana del Ssmo. Nombre de Jesus*, I, *Bibliografía*, Manila, 1965, pp. 346-348.

Prieto del Pozo, J., OFM., *La Corporación franciscana en Filipinas*, en: *Misiones Católicas en Extremo Oriente*, (Manila 1937), p. 12.

¹⁹ Juan de Plasencia, OFM, was a noted Franciscan grammarian-scholar who came with the first group of Franciscans in 1578. He was the Presiding Superior in 1580 when important decisions on Franciscan methods and rules were laid regarding the Franciscan missionary work in the Philippines. The moving spirit behind the Filipino colonial town and settlement, he enjoined that missionaries should study the language of the natives. He promoted the building of schools.

²⁰ Huerta, Felix, OFM. His contributions for the Manila of the 19th century consisted in founding or promoting El Monte de Piedad, the Carriedo water system, the San Lazaro Hospital and other civic projects.

²¹ To have a better idea for these arguments, there are many good works published by Fr. Lorenzo Perez, OFM, about the Philippines and the Franciscans in various occasions. See *Archivo Ibero-Americano*; Num. I, II, IV, V, VII, IX, X, XI, XII, XVIII, and XXXII. See also *Obras sociales realizadas por los Franciscanos en Filipinas*, 1578-1900 ed. by Fr. Valentin Marin, O.P. *Ensayo de una Síntesis de los Trabajos Realizados por las Corporaciones Religiosas de Filipinas*, Vol. II, pp. 290-612.

An interesting note, however, may still enlighten us: that Rizal had a certain sympathy and, surprisingly, fondness for the Franciscans. Rizal mentioned the Franciscans in his diary when he narrated his voyage from Marseilles to Hongkong. In the boat he took during the trip was a group of missionaries, almost all of them Franciscans, on their way to China. This occasioned Rizal to comment on the Franciscans in the Philippines. In his conversation with one of them, there was a Bishop familiar with Manila. Rizal inquired how true was the malicious gossip that the Franciscans were rich. Now the Bishop retorted that "If that is so, then they are no longer Franciscans". Rizal even played cards with the missionaries on board. Then when he arrived in Suez, he joined the group and stayed in the Franciscan-Capuchin convent where he described his stay with them. The sympathy, the service and the care that the Capuchin fathers showed him certainly touched him.²²

There are many other incidents in Rizal's life that reveal his sympathy towards the Franciscans.²³ It is an interesting historical detail to cite that Rizal read and was influenced by the book of Fr. Felix Huerta's "Estado...", when he describes the procession of San Francisco in Intramuros.²⁴ It may be a coincidence, moreover, but it is a fact that among the few pictorial and sculptural sketches that are preserved and attributed to Rizal, (as he relates in *Dos Diarios de Juventud, 1882-1884*) there are two works that may catch one's attention: one is the sculpture of the popular Franciscan saint, St. Anthony de Padua, and other, the anonymous, back-view drawing of a Franciscan. What moved Rizal into doing this? The question still stands.

The Franciscan friar in Rizal's time, furthermore, was the popular and "classic" parish priest in the Philippines. This friar is easily distinguished by his habit of "cotton", the cord and the sandals without socks. He was a familiar image to all Filipinos, mostly in Manila and in the nearby provinces. *Fiestas*,²⁵ various

²² Rizal, Jose, *Dos Diarios de Juventud, 1882-1884*, Ediciones Cultura-Hispánica, Madrid, 1960.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Huerta, Felix, *ESTADO*, pp. 19-34.

²⁵ *Fiestas* in the Philippines are popular, religious occasions to honor and thank the patron saints of the locality where the people celebrate

devotions and pious customs carry the characteristic mark that can be called Franciscan, not because they are Franciscan, but because it was through the Franciscans that these Filipino celebrations were popularized, and eventually became integral to Filipino culture. In fact, most of the religious celebrations of nationwide renown originated in these following churches, Antipolo,²⁶ Obando,²⁷ Quiapo,²⁸ Sta. Clara,²⁹ Peñafrancia,³⁰ Sta. Ana,³¹ all administered by Franciscans. Rizal himself talks in these terms when he described Franciscan influence with a certain literary sarcasm:

.... Here also was St. Paschal, the dancer, patron of pregnancy and hope of childless couples. And there was St. Anthony of Padua, in the Franciscan habit, tearfully contemplating a Child Jesus attired in the uniform of a Governor-General, complete with a three-cornered hat, sabre, and high boots, as for a children's costume party in Madrid. Capitan Tiago interpreted this as proof that, even if God were to acquire the powers of a Spanish-Governor-General in the Philippines, the Franciscans would still treat Him like a doll³²

Moreover, images and religious articles that overflow "antique shops" as well as churches show a strong Franciscan influence. In this following quotation, the popularity of the V.O.T. (The Third Order of St. Francis, which is the secular

according to their peculiar folkloric traditions. These are still practiced at present.

²⁶ The well known feast of Antipolo in Rizal province honors Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage during the month of May.

²⁷ The also well known feast of Obando in Bulacan province honors the feastdays of San Pascual Baylon and Sta. Clara in which childless couples dance to their delight to beseech these saints' intercession.

²⁸ The feast of Quiapo in Manila is held on January 9 of every year to honor the Black Nazarene.

²⁹ The feast of Sta. Clara, the founder of Poor Clares, is held every 12 of August to which people associate good weather by offering eggs and other gifts.

³⁰ The feast of Our Lady of Peñafrancia is a special feast among the Bikolanos of Southern Luzon who celebrate it by means of a colorful, fluvial parade.

³¹ The feast of Sta. Ana in Manila is held every 12 of May in honor of our Lady of the Abandoned whose miraculous generosity and care for all those who call on her has become almost legendary.

³² Rizal, Jose. *Noli Me Tangere*, Edición del Centenario, Manila, Comisión Nacional del Centenario del Jose Rizal, 1961. English translation is by Leon Ma. Guerrero, London, Longmays, Green and Co., 1961.

counterpart of the first order of St. Francis where the members also follow St. Francis' ideals) is delineated by Rizal, with the flavor of the nineteenth century social and religious ambience:

".... At eight-thirty in the morning, the procession started under cover of the canvas canopy. It was similar to the one the day before, although with one novelty: the Venerable Third Order. Old men and women, and a number of old maids, had clad themselves in long habits: the poor wore them in coarse cotton cloth, the rich in silk, known as Franciscan cotton, because it was more often worn by the reverend Franciscan friars. All these sacred habits were genuine. They came from the Franciscan convent in Manila where the people could acquire them in exchange for a donation in cash at a fixed rate, if such a commercial phrase is permissible. This fixed rate might be raised but not lowered. Besides, these other habits were also sold in some convents, and in the monastery of St. Clare, which had not only the special quality of gaining many indulgences for the dead enshrouded in them but the even more special quality of being all the more expensive, the older, more tattered, and more un-wearable, they were."³³

For some unknown reason, Rizal does not describe in his writings the Franciscans as a corporation. In various occasions, he mentions the Franciscans as an Order without clarifying what, and who, composes the Order. He simply makes, Fr. Damaso a member of the Order. Rizal, in this light, does not attack the Franciscan characteristics like poverty, although he sometimes describes Fr. Damaso as a monster crowned with capital sins. The role Rizal has assigned to the Franciscans is as bearers of the spiritual values in the Philippines. Up to this point, he regards the Franciscans as spiritual fathers of the people with whom he lives and shares his life. Thus, though Rizal, with his rich imaginative pen adds other characteristic features to Fr. Damaso, he does not, for a fact, attribute any of his "characteristics" to the order to whom he belongs. It would be of interest to note that the maligned "Hacienda"³⁴ and all its concomitant evils,

³³ *Noli Me Tangere* by Jose Rizal p. 164; Leon Ma. Guerrero's English translation, pp. 185-186.

³⁴ "Hacienda" is the Spanish word for a landed estate and the property or possessions therein.

did not exist in those places administered by the Franciscan Order. Unfortunately, however, this is one section of Philippine history that is not well-explored with historical data. Studying Franciscan poverty in the Philippines, in fact, is one answer to the numerous indiscriminate statements hurled against the friars.³⁵

FR. DAMASO VERDALONGAS, FRANCISCAN

Admittedly, Fr. Damaso is one of the main characters in Rizal's novels. He carries considerable weight by the way Rizal presents him and more so, if his characterization is taken within the Filipino context where all myths about the friars have been exploited to benefit the *ilustrado's* personal interest. Rizal paints Fr. Damaso realistically:

.... By way of contrast, the other friar, a Franciscan, was a man of many words and even more numerous gestures. Although his hair was greying, his robust constitution seemed well preserved. His classic feature, penetrating look, heavy jaws, and herculean build, gave him the appearance of a Roman patrician in disguise....

However, Fr. Damaso was not so mysterious as that; he was a jovial man, and if the tone of his voice was rough, like that of a man who has never held his tongue, and who thinks that what he says is dogma and beyond question, his frank and jolly laughter erased this disagreeable impression; one could even forgive him when he thrust out toward the company a naked pair of hairy legs that would have made a fortune at the freak-show of any suburban fair.³⁶

Details of this description enable one to figure out how Fr. Damaso looked physically. But his spiritual personality is not as simple as it appears, if the reader carefully understands the Rizalian pages. Sometimes he is a drunkard, at other times, a bully.³⁷ "... Go on!" Fr. Damaso challenged him, closing in with fists

³⁵ See the manuscript of Fr. Marcos Gomez, OFM, *Sobre la Revolución Filipina del 1898 en Ambos Camarines* in the Archivo Franciscano in Pastana, Spain, where personal accounts on this aspect illustrate the different behavior of the revolutionaries and the simple Filipino people.

³⁶ *Noli*, p. 4; English trans. p. 5.

³⁷ *Noli*, p. 6; English trans. p. 7.

clenched. "Do you think that under my cassock, I am less of a man...?"³⁸ Braggart and lover of parties and gossips, he was....

.... The Chinese? Are you crazy?! exclaimed Fr. Damaso, Don't be silly, ma'am. Gunpowder was invented by a Franciscan like myself, a certain Father Something — or — other Savalls, in the seventh century....³⁹

Whether by oversight or otherwise, Fr. Damaso's portion turned out to be composed of a lot of squash and broth with barely a chicken neck and wing, while his fellow guests were eating chicken legs and chicken breasts.... The Franciscan seeing this, mashed the squash violently, took a few spoonfuls of broth, and then loudly dropped his spoon and pushed his plate away....⁴⁰

Is that all? The Franciscan, who had not said a word from the start of the dinner, distracted perhaps by the food, now let out a roar of mocking laughter....⁴¹

.... is the blessed Diego de Alcala. I say 'cause all that he was a great Saint, is only a soldier in the racks, a mess steward, in that most powerful army which our Seraphic Father of St. Francis commands from Heaven and to which I have the honour to belong as corporal or sergeant, by the grace of God.⁴²

Humble and retiring Saint, your wooden cross (actually the image had a silver one), your modest habit, honor the great Francis of whom we are the sons and imitators. We multiply your holy breed throughout the world, in every corner, in the cities, in the towns, without distinction between white and black (there the governor held his breath), suffering privations and tortures, all for the holy breed of faith and armed religion (the governor signed with relief), which maintains the world in equilibrium and prevents it from falling into the abyss of perdition.⁴³

Look here, the Franciscan went on, cutting the governor short, one of our lay brothers, the most stupid one we have at that, has built a hospital, good and cheap. He knew how to get work done, and he didn't pay more than eight coppers a day even to those who had to come

³⁸ *Noli*, p. 8; English trans. p. 10.

³⁹ *Noli Me Tangere*, English translation, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

from other towns. The chap knew how to treat the natives, not like many know-it-alls and second class half-breeds who spoil them by paying three or four sovereigns.⁴⁴

These quotations help one imagine the kind of Franciscan Rizal presented in the person of Fr. Damaso. Naturally, he had a purpose in this spurious description, and most of the times, it was to mock Fr. Damaso's mannerisms. This is true even as the ability of the writer sends the reader to guffaws, with their imagination flying away in search of that friar in flesh and bone. Ludicrous exaggeration may not be true but it may be true in the name of caricature. Rizal has captured in Fr. Damaso's character some of the friars' vulgar lives in the Philippines.

At this juncture, it will be good to recall the words of D. Antonio Ma. Regidor in his letter to Rizal:

"And who does not know Fr. Damaso? Alas, I have seen him, and treated him! Although in his brilliant fictitious description he wears the dirty Franciscan habit; rude, despotic, and corrupted, I have observed him, sometimes in the Augustinian habit, sometimes a Franciscan as you describe him and some other times discalced and in the habit of the Recollects pretending to know everything."⁴⁵

Thus one sees that in Rizal's novels, Fr. Damaso does not personify any priest in particular, but rather, embodies all the capital sins attributed to the clergy from the environment of those days, in addition to the stories and legends which the new breed of Filipino *ilustrado* fostered about these men of the cloth. This is naturally an offshoot of the Filipino *ilustrados* collaborating with the anti-church Spaniards, who during the nineteenth century, were plentiful in the islands as well as in the Peninsula. What perhaps would project a more balanced view is to consider Fr. Damaso's entirety of defects as characteristic of all the friars in the Philippines during that time. History will prove that the simple people who lived under the shadow of the friars did not

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁴⁵ Regidor, Don Antonio, Ma., in his letter to Rizal on May 3, 1887. See *Noli Me Tangere*, edición del centenario, Apéndices, p. 3, nota 23.

see such a monster as drawn by the upper class who had an ax to grind. In fact, when the revolution came and the people were incited by the revolutionaries to kill and molest their parish priests, they did not only refuse to do it, but in most instances, the people respected, venerated, and protected the cura-friars of the town during those tumultuous days.⁴⁶

But Rizal goes further in his treatment of the Franciscans in his works. He presents other Franciscan friars, under the names of Fr. Salvi and Fr. Sybila. It could be said that altogether DAMASO-SALVI-SYBILA, was the image and concept that Rizal had of the priest in the Philippines during his time. Rizal describes F. Salvi as deeply spiritual and ascetic. He comes out as foil to the pragmatic and weak Fr. Damaso in his spiritual personality as well as in the physical silhouette. Some direct quotations may confirm this:

.... He was a young Franciscan, thin, pale, drawn, who gazed at her...⁴⁷

Only the young Franciscan did not sleep, and kept watch in his convent cell. His elbow on the windowsill, his pale thin face resting on the palm of his hand....⁴⁸

.... The parish priest was Fr. Bernardo Salvi, the young and taciturn Franciscan who had replaced Fr. Damaso. In his habits and manners, he was very different from the usual run of members of his Order, even more so from his pugnacious predecessor. Fr. Salvi was thin, sickly, almost constantly immersed in his own thoughts, strict in the performance of his religious duties, and careful of his good name. He made such an impression on his parishioners that barely a month after his arrival almost everyone in San Diego had joined the lay auxiliary of the Franciscan Order, the Tertiaries, to the discomfiture of the rival Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary sponsored by the Dominicans...⁴⁹

.... But the young man had no eyes for the joys of homecoming; he was staring at a friar who was walk-

⁴⁶ Abundant material is contained in the Franciscan Archives in Pas-trana, Spain, still unpublished to prove this interesting point in the history of the Philippines. An example is the unpublished manuscript of Fr. Marcos Gomez. Though not much has been done on this aspect.

⁴⁷ English translation of *Noli Me Tangere*, p. 27.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

ing towards him. It was the parish priest of San Diego, the brooding Franciscan who was the commanding officer's enemy. The wind folded back the wide wings of his hat and pressed the cotton habit close to his body, outlining his thin curved flanks. He carried in his right hand a walking-stick with an ivory handle."⁵⁰

This is Fr. Salvi, the successor of Fr. Damaso Verdalongas in his pastoral administration of the town of San Diego. He cuts out a figure very different from Fr. Damaso, but not necessarily far from the reality if some historical factors are considered from the Franciscan historical background. For if Fr. Damaso can be identified in one way or another with the popular figure of the town's friar-cura, Fr. Salvi could very appropriately represent the realistic Franciscan-Alcantarine reform⁵¹ responsible for the recruitment of Franciscan missionaries in the Philippines. At any rate, Rizal is not exactly one-sided in approach; he saved the situation by presenting two Franciscan characters personified in Fr. Damaso and Fr. Salvi. If Rizal's purpose were to describe one with the vices and earthy miseries, and the other with the religious virtues, then the former is closer to the truth while the latter is far from the objective. The character of Fr. Salvi reflects a false criticism, and the stamp of his austerity is only to cover the low impulse of an uncontrollable lust. From the psychological point of view, Fr. Salvi is more dangerous than Fr. Damaso. In the novel's fictitious situation Rizal presents Fr. Salvi as secretly in love with Maria Clara, and this secret is sometimes neurotically manifested.

Rizal does not redeem his poor concept and evaluation of the priest. Does it mean that for Rizal there was not one respectable and benevolent friar during his time? Must all ecclesiastical characters be defective professionally and personally? Perhaps, one can only conclude that this confirms Rizal's anti-ecclesiastical

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵¹ Alcantarine reform refers to the reforms initiated during the 16th century by St. Pedro de Alcantara who distinguished himself for his ascetic poverty and mysticism. He was also one of the spiritual directors of St. Theresa of Avila. Most of the Franciscans who came to the Philippines during the 16th century started from Seville, Spain where St. Pedro de Alcantara used to live for a time.

feelings.⁵² A more impartial and objective study will show that the evangelization of the Philippines was done by men of all levels and competence but certainly many of them proved to be committed to their missionary task, even up to the time when Rizal lamented the ecclesiastical irregularities in his writings. The Franciscan chronicles, in fact, register names of venerable men who with their wisdom and holiness, dedicated themselves and served the Filipino people up to the end. Some of these names are even in the sanctoral of the church.

Once again, this question persists: Why did Rizal place the Franciscans in his novels? The answer could be in general terms: that Dr. Jose Rizal was not anti-Franciscan, and therefore his motivation to include the Franciscans in his novels cannot be out of personal retaliation but rather to play the fictitious game of his novels. Facts may even prove that Rizal was a sympathizer of the Franciscans. He incarnated in Fr. Damaso the friar-cura of the town and made him Franciscan as it could be Augustinian, Dominican, or Recollect. But since during that time, the Franciscans enjoyed an undeniable popularity as parish priests, it was only appropriate to make Fr. Damaso a Franciscan in the novel, *Noli Me Tangere*.

After all, Rizal's novels are set within the geographical framework that can be considered Franciscan territory. Rizal called the Philippines, "Frailandia". The friars were identified with the church and the state, a union which was so close that if Rizal were to write, he could not help but come into pen conflict with the friars in the islands. The other details he included are part of his artistic ability to expose his political ideas anchored on the historical context of this Spanish colony.

It is at once very interesting and logical to observe that Maria Clara, the novel's heroine, is the daughter of an illicit relationship between Dr. Damaso, a Spanish friar, and a native woman. There is no doubt that here lies the core of Rizal's thesis: Maria Clara could not be other than the symbolic personification of the Philippines. Her origin, Spanish-Filipino and a progeny of the

⁵² Rizal's anti-ecclesiastical bias is evident in his written attacks on the church in the Philippines during his time. But since this paper does not aim to discuss this in detail, what has been written here suffices.

friars,⁵³ traces a strong and rich parallelism to some historical facts within the Filipino context. It is true that the Philippines is an epic of the patriotic missionary friars to represent the interest of both the cross and the sword. And it is precisely this venom in Rizal's pen; to put an end to this situation that he directs his symbolism. The Philippines have to be authentic and independent; the existing one is "mestiza", a daughter of a friar. Henceforth, as long as she is under the power and influence of the friars, the Philippines will be the Maria Clara, and would end insane in a convent. In this light, Rizal delineated very clearly the origin as well as the significance of Maria Clara.⁵⁴

Some Filipino historians have been inclined to see in Maria Clara the physical description of Leonor Rivera, Jose Rizal's first love. But certainly the way he describes and develops her characterization discloses his desire to stress the "mestizo" progeny and to put her at a distance from her apparent father, Captain Tiago. From this perspective, in making Fr. Damaso the father of Maria Clara, Rizal does not make any personal offense against the Franciscans; on the contrary, it comes as a logical need of the symbolism he utilized in casting his characters, although the intended sarcasm of the author remains.

Rizal's novels are not "ordinary novels" where the main objective is to feast the reader's imagination with an absorbing fictitious story. If the reader perceives deeper, he will note that Rizal aims at something more meaningful. Rizal himself alluded to this aspect in various occasions in his letters to his friends to justify certain points in his novels. In a letter to Resurreccion Hidalgo, even the given title of *Noli Me Tangere* as well as most of his writings manifest a colorful historical approach.

It would be unfair, of course, to stress the historical facts at the expense of fiction, without any reference to some definite historical background in the same manner that the history of a people cannot be built on some blind feelings toward certain abuses committed by the friars. Rizal does not reflect the authentic situation of the clergy during the nineteenth century and to deduce

⁵³ Cavanna, Jesus, *Rizal and the Philippines of His Days*, Manila, 1957, p. 198.

⁵⁴ Radaic, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

conclusions after reading him may only obliterate truth. History cannot be connected with passionate readings. Neither does Rizal lose merits in his literary description by intensifying some colors to touch the feelings of the Filipinos. What is imperative is to appreciate the history of the Philippines with some balance of truth. It will take time, perhaps, since the last years of Spanish presence in the islands have left some unhappy events that were exploited by the Propaganda writers so that, in a way, they hamper the task of seeing the truth with more equanimity and reality of the given moment.

CONCLUSION

Rizal's novels can be studied under many angles. This study aimed only to trace the Franciscan presence in his writings. The conclusion points out that Rizal did not have any personal motives to attack the Franciscans. It was rather within the larger context of the frailocracy of the Propaganda Movement in the Philippines. Thus, Rizal castigated the religious orders with exaggeration, sarcasm and rancor to the extent that his personal feelings could not really be harmonized with the historical facts. Rizal's novels, for a fact, are not impartial books. But behind that purpose Rizal does not fail to recognize and appreciate the almost three thousand Franciscan friars who, from 1578 to 1900, worked in the Philippines under the Spanish flag, and thereby contributing substantially in the making of a Christian nation. On the other hand, the Franciscans too, as well as the other religious orders, cannot erase with a simple or passionate protest the actual stains that belong to the great epic of the evangelization of the Philippines.

PEDRO RUAÑO, O.F.M.
Manila