

Building the Filipino Nation in the Mind and Heart of Dr. Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera

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Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, whose thoughts and aspirations strongly echoed those of his close friend Jose Rizal, was a controversial figure much maligned and misunderstood by his contemporaries. Even today he remains an obscure figure in Philippine history books. This presentation is an attempt to reconstruct his image in the light of research on the motivations behind his actions in relation to the building of the Filipino nation. He was an extremely intelligent man, a polymath, subtle and complex in his perceptions and did not follow the crowd. We might say of him that he was a man who marched to a different drum in the chaotic days of the revolution and its aftermath.

In this brief paper I will first give a short account of his life and his activities. This will be followed by an exposition of his thoughts on the budding Filipino nation. This division, however, is arbitrary, for the ideals, thoughts and actions of a person cannot be dissociated from what she/he is.

The beliefs of Dr. Trinidad Hermenegildo Pardo de Tavera Gorricho (1857-1925) have their origin in his family background, in the historical events and decisive moments of his past, his experiences, studies and observations. To know some of those happenings we have

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to look back in history as far as 1872. Trinidad Pardo de Tavera. was the nephew of the famous attorney Joaquin Pardo de Tavera Gómez who became a surrogate father to Trinidad who lost his own father at the age of six.

Don Joaquín was a man who freely expressed his liberal convictions in a time when liberalism was limited only to the Peninsula. He was also a friend and co-teacher of Fr. Jose Burgos. These two things put him in difficulty during the regime of Governor General Rafael Izquierdo, who was adamantly against liberal reforms in the Philippines. As a repercussion of the mutiny of Cavite, Don Joaquín was one of the first to be imprisoned for treason and later unjustly sentenced to exile for four years in Guam, in the Marianas Islands.

Schumacher (1997:8-9) describes thus that event: "The Cavite mutiny and its aftermath had lasting and important effects on the Philippine situation, particularly, where friars were concerned... The Spanish authorities grew more suspicious than ever of Filipino priests and of the Filipino *ilustrados* as well. They tended to back the friars unreservedly, seeing enemies of Spanish rule in all who opposed the friars..."

This event affected the Tavera family very much especially Trinidad, who became hostile towards the Spanish friars and many of —the representatives of the Spanish government in the Philippines. This also influenced him throughout his later political actions and decisions, as well as his writings. He expressed this as follows: ... "during the Spanish period, I became acquainted with the errors of that administration, and for the benefit of my country, I wished to work together with the Spaniards then in power, in order to correct some of the abuses and to modify the situation" (Norton, —:93-102).

After his exile, Don Joaquin established himself with his wife in Paris where he also moved the family of his deceased brother. Trinidad, his mother and his brother and sister. There, Trinidad studied medicine and received the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the Sorbonne. It was there, too, where he became a fervent follower of Modern Positivism and showed predilection for the study of philology, obtaining a diploma from the School of Oriental Languages.

From this time until his death, he wrote numerous works mainly in medicine, linguistics. history, ethnography, geography, agriculture, immigration, sociology, politics....

Aside from his work as a physician and his extensive social relations, he also became Scientific Commissioner of her Majesty Isabel, Queen of Spain, to the Philippines, general delegate of the Academic Indo-Chinese Society of France in the Philippines, founder of the Spanish Society of Hygiene, member of the Anthropological Society of Berlin, secretary of the Legation of the Dominican Republic in Paris, member of the Economic Society of the Philippines and Cadiz, and other functions.

His house in Paris was the meeting place of the “Indios Bravos” and many other “ilustrados” of his time. He was a close friend of Rizal and of Juan Luna, the husband of his sister, Paz. According to Kalaw (1920:134-135), it was in Paris where he became a member of Masonry and he later organized in the Philippines the Rizal Lodge of which majority of the Filipino intellectuals at the time became members.

The assassination of his mother and sister by his brother-in-law Juan Luna was a sad and tragic event that shook the life of the entire Tavera family, especially Trinidad's.

He returned to the Philippines in 1892 and practiced his profession as physician. He was also a professor of anatomy at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) and continued with his research and publications on topics related to the Philippines. He did not take active part in the revolution against Spain, nor did he know of the inside workings of the Katipunan, the force that brought about the Revolution. Perhaps, because he neither spoke nor wrote on political matters at this time, and perhaps, also because of his Spanish lineage and features, the Spanish colonial government trusted him enough to appoint him captain and physician of the regiment of San Miguel when the armed revolution began. However, he soon resigned, claiming reasons of ill health (Reyes, 1908:38-39).

When Aguinaldo organized his cabinet in Malolos, he appointed Pardo de Tavera undersecretary of Diplomatic Relations, but after two months, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera presented his resignation. This was due to his realization that the government of Malolos did not accept the letter he gave the President proposing that the Philippines be a part of the United States and asking for a peaceful solution to the situation.

Later Pardo de Tavera expressed what he thought about it in this manner; and I quote:

The Philippines gave us an example of a conquered people, whose most intense preoccupation was to constitute itself in the quickest possible way as an independent nation. This mentality of the Filipinos was very natural and was manifested during the Spanish Regime... the American domination was not imposed for good but for tutorship. Its principal objective is to educate and to make the Filipino capable of self-governance. . . so we should direct all our energies to the constitution of our nationality. Often this attitude is called illogically "ingratitude" but, on the contrary, was it not this awakening to a sense of nationalism when we were offered the opportunity to educate ourselves for self-government the most logical and national as well as natural?" (Norton, —:6).

He addressed himself to Secretary Taft declaring his purpose for collaboration with the Americans saying: "I have not accepted American sovereignty for the pleasure of being under the domination of a foreign nation, but because I thought that such was necessary to educate us in self-government."

He founded the newspaper *La Democracia* in 1899 to let the people know his objective of having a peaceful agreement with the US for the benefit of the Philippines. He was severely criticized for this way of thinking, and it was taken against him as a proof of his being anti-Filipino, and his lack of patriotism (Lopez, 1933:167).

He was the first president of the first Filipino political party, the Federal Party, which was formed in 1900. The aim of the Federal Party was to seek acceptance of the Philippines as another state in the Federal Union of the United States and its immediate concern was the acceptance of American sovereignty over the Philippines, 'stabilization and peace, education and autonomous government (Arcilla, 1998:111).

The strong reaction of some people against this party gave birth to an opposing group, the Nationalist Party, aimed at the absolute and immediate independence from the USA.

Pardo de Tavera was named member of the Philippine Civil Commission and he accompanied Governor Taft to the provinces to implement this new civil government. When the next governor, Luke Wright, tolerated human rights abuses, Pardo de Tavera wrote about it to the government in Washington. This brought him much criticism from Americans on both sides of the Pacific (Paredes, 1989:54-55, 58-59).

While he was a member of the Philippine Commission, he contributed greatly toward the Filipinization of the government established by the Americans... Through his recommendation many competent Filipinos were appointed to government posts. He was instrumental in the establishment of the first state medical school in the country. Together with other physicians he organized an association known as Colegio Medico Farmaceutico de Filipinas... He invested his energies in another project to promote the general welfare of his countrymen and women: the creation of a state university free from clerical control, the University of the Philippines. This proposal was accepted by the Commission (Alzona, —:13).

Trinidad Pardo de Tavera was perceived to have been a collaborator with the “enemy” by those who wanted immediate independence. Actually it was a type of critical collaboration with the *facto* rulers. However the conviction that the Filipino people have to be prepared for independence gradually grew on him. He was critical to the point that the Americans eventually wanted to replace him with more pliable minds.

Pardo de Tavera resigned from the Philippine Commission and was replaced by a prominent Filipino politician. Assembly Speaker Sergio Osmeña, head of the Nationalist Party (Paredes, 1989:66).

From 1909 at the age of 52 up to his death in 1925 at the age of 68, he dedicated himself totally to intellectual work. It was a “crusade for intellectual liberation from traditional ways, superstitions, feudalistic customs, class pressure and dominance, established modes of thinking, religious intolerance, and the dogmatism of the preceding regime” (Manuel, 1955:1,342).

Trinidad’s achievements, added to those of his uncle Joaquin, clearly established the pre-eminence of the Pardo de Tavera family. As Paredes (1994:349) puts it: “like it or not, Filipinos must come to terms with the fact that Pardo de Tavera, more clearly than any other political prominent family, has played a central role in the formation of the Philippine nationhood for more than a century.”

Pardo De Tavera's Ideas About Nation

As early as 1891, when Dr. Trinidad was 34, he wrote an article under the Pseudonym of *Barbilampiño* (without a beard —although

curiously enough, he was with beard all his life) in *La Solidaridad*, where he said that the so called "Deplorable State of the Philippines" was due to the domination, intolerance, and mismanagement of the Spanish government and the Spanish friars.

On the other hand, he was also convinced that Aguinaldo's government was a "home grown tyranny." Because of all this he felt that the Americans should establish a protectorate in the Philippines and extend all rights of the US to the Filipino people in order to form an educated citizenry capable of eventually governing themselves in a democratic manner (Paredes, 1994:403).

He wanted to make his ideas known to the Filipinos so in May 1899 he started a daily newspaper, *La Democracia*. In the first issue he stated his objectives as follows: the promotion of peace, the separation of the church and state, autonomy for the Philippines, representation in the American Congress, and to make the Philippines an American state. All this was what he, together with the "ilustrados" of his time, had wanted to obtain from Spain years before.

Thus, Pardo de Tavera's greatest wish was the progress of the Philippines, that the Filipinos would be freed from a paternalistic and oppressive government and that justice and peace would reign all over the islands. He enjoined all Filipinos to show the Americans what they wanted and aspired for, with respect to education, political representation and administration wishing that all Filipinos would have engraved in their minds and heart the motto "All for the Philippines!" (*La Democracia*, 1899 no.1).

Through the various editorials he had written for *La Democracia* he delineated the ways of becoming a free nation: "one of the first steps is to teach the people to think by themselves and to work hard so that people would progress... And, to the Filipinos he said: learn to criticize the government, so that we can make of it the kind of government we really want."

In May 1899, he wrote: "In Manila the Filipinos who work for peace love our country as much as those who give their lives in the battle field for Her. The only difference is that they want to obtain independence the fast way, through violence. We also want independence but at the right time, through peaceful means." (*La Democracia*, May 22). He emphasized that democracy was the way of governance that would save the country (*La Democracia*, June 28).

When he returned from his trip to USA in 1904, he declared in an interview that he did not believe that the American Congress should make any definite decision for the islands (Philippines) without first consulting the Filipino people ... "I believed that when the Filipino people have become sufficiently well instructed in government affairs a plebiscite should be held where every Filipino of sufficient intelligence should express whether or not an independent government is desirable." (Manila Cable News, November 2, 1904)

In 1905, he said in Batangas that "there is no Filipino with an ideal different from mine in so far as obtaining independence is concerned, but the propitious moment has not come" (*El Renacimiendo*, 21 February, 1905).

In the same year, in his address during the convention of the Federal Party of which he was the president, he mentioned: "Our concern is that no form of colonization should be established again in any way. Hence all our efforts should be directed toward the awakening of our people's sentiments of respect for justice, freedom, individual action, public instruction, responsibilities, the exercise of rights and performance of duties. We have to make sure that by educating our people, we will reserve for them a place in the international concert of nations and of great people..."

In 1906 when he wrote about "The Filipino Souls", he presented clearly his complete idea of becoming a nation and the necessary requirements to attain it. These are the same ideas he maintained all his life, although they were expressed in different ways, and I quote:

The Filipino people, more endeared each day to the noble aspiration for independence, want a democratic form of government. On the other hand, their customs, traditions, and education tend to produce a mentality which is very distinct from, and is wholly opposed to, the mentality of the young democratic nations. With a monarchic spirit like this, there cannot rise a democratic, a free, and a tolerant nation. The people must first change their mentality and imbibe a new spirit, so that the work of our social revolution through peaceful political evolution and our free public school instruction may be crowned with success. "The laws of education," said Montesquieu, "are different in each form of government; in monarchies, their aim is honor; in despotic government, fear; and in republics, virtue." Now then, we who have been educated under a monarchy know perfectly well that the stimulus to honor has now and then plunged us into the evils of

self-pride; we know that long submission under despotic government has created in our minds the feelings of fear, of respect, of inaction, and of passivity. Now that we are living under a republican government, we should organize an educational system whose chief aim, as Montesquieu says, is virtue. Through education, we may be sure of awakening the spirit of work, of tolerance, of peace, of economy, and of respect for the law -of everything which makes life possible under liberal institutions, which are not inimical to, but in consonance with, the ideals of liberty and democracy.

Aside from looking at education as one of the pillars for building a nation, he also emphasized work as another strong pillar. In a talk given to the youth of Sampaloc Intermediate School library he said, "one of the most important manifestations of a trained character and developed will is labor. I should have said the most important because work is really the foundation of prosperity and greatness of nations. One of the greatest glories of democracy is to have shown.. . that work ennobles and that men must not be judged by the kind of work they perform but by what they are capable of doing... A nation cannot live solely by the work of men devoted to intellectual labor: farmers, artisans, men who work with their hands to till the ground, who dig the mines, and who develop all sorts of industries.., are the men who make the nation great, rich, and prosperous.., a nation without them cannot prosper ..." (1906, To The Youth of the Philippine Sampaloc Intermediate School)

In the same talk he mentioned that "A nation is the sum of the individuals composing it, so the higher the character of each individual, the greater the number of important units in education and productive capacity, the higher will be the type of nation that these units make up... Nations are not composed of people with the same physical characteristics, but of people who have the same sentiments, common aspirations and ideals..."

Having put an end to his political career, in a "despedida" given in his honor before going abroad, he reiterated:

We are forming a new nation... and it should be free and capable of offering freedom to all her people... and for this we have to teach our people to be responsible, to know and fulfill their duties, for them to enjoy their rights... I want to prepare our people so that they will not be exploited by the political authorities and

oppressed by the social government. I aspire for social transformation, without which any political change will be superficial and will not serve the true interests/concerns of our people. I want to develop the individual qualities of each one so that everyone can develop himself to the fullest..."

Dr. Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera maintained the same ideas all through out his life. He was a man of constant convictions manifested in a number of ways. He loved his country and wanted a nation no less than any other country.

In summary, he expressed his thoughts in the following words in 1911, and I quote:

The establishment of schools is a need; discussion of political ideas is a right. To work for independence is a just aspiration. Corollary to this is our duty to work for the improvement of the condition of the Filipino people, so that they will eventually acquire the means to clothe themselves, to improve their housing, to better nourish themselves, and to protect themselves against diseases. In other words, to uplift their way of life... without which there can never be any moral progress..." (*Philippine Free Press*, August 5, 1911).

A few months before his death, in January 1925, he talked about the "Rising Generation" to the law students of UP. He emphasized that in order to build the nation. we must consider the kind of people the nation has, and he said to them:

All of you all can be useful for our progress, because (at the end of your studies) you will be prepared to understand that without justice there can not be peace and harmony among men. You will likewise realize that justice cannot exist without prior knowledge of the truth and that the primary duty of the modern citizen is to try to discover the truth and proclaim it without fear of the consequences whatever they flay be. This is what we call civic courage which is one of the strengths of social progress...

You are the young people of the rising generation: As students of law it is your duty to build the nation by molding men of true character regardless of race, age, condition or occupation. Men who are confident to strive by themselves, who have the courage to proclaim the quality of the rights of men and women, men who are slaves of the truth and can be of great value to our society.

Dr. Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera was a practical man who did not elaborate poetic ideas about the nation but he defined the kind of people needed to form it. In his case, nation building could not dissociate from his early experiences of unfairness since 1872 when he was still a teenage and already he felt in his own family the effects of tyranny, lies and intrigue... up to his death after working very hard for truth, justice and peace. He searched for all possible means to have the kind of nation he wanted the Philippines to be.

Integrity of purpose is the trait that stands out, as we can see from the writings of this noble man who succeeded in being everything from a doctor, a historian, a writer, an educator... to his being an involved man in the administration of the affairs of state, as his being a dreamer of an utopia.

Trinidad Pardo de Tavera say: deeply into the aspirations of his people for freedom.. independence, nationhood. But he also knew from his vast knowledge of cultures and civilizations that political structures would be hollow and fragile if simply imposed on a society that was not ready for them. His vision went further than that of many of his contemporaries. He knew that they had to deal with the Contingencies of the moment, but his was a vision of the long haul that Philippine society had to be constructed painstakingly, laboriously, that those who aspired for freedom had to be guided by the compass of integrative and self-sacrifice, and that a liberating, and empowering education had to be the foundation of it all.

A hundred years after the revolution, with, half a century of self-rule under Filipino leaders, for sure we realize now the truth of what Trinidad Pardo de Tavera saw. Perhaps, in this context we can value the man for what he was: a visionary, a practical thinker, a patriot among patriots.

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