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Paul A. Dumol

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# Political Responsibility in Rizal's *Filibusterismo*

PAUL A. DUMOL  
UNIVERSITY OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
PHILIPPINES



Through most of his life (from 1877 to 1890), José Rizal was a staunch admirer of philosophy and had not the slightest doubt that it held the key to unlocking the meaning of history. This is a key premise of his novel, *Noli me tângere*. In 1891, however, while in the throes of a personal crisis, his thinking on the matter changed, and we find, with the appearance of his second novel, *El Filibusterismo*, that it is theology that casts light upon history's meaning.<sup>1</sup> But if Rizal, formally speaking, was not a philosopher, he decidedly was not a theologian. Indeed, the putative "theology" of the *Fili*, as the *Filibusterismo* is affectionately called by Filipinos, reads more like philosophy. It would be more exact, however, to say it *outlines* a social philosophy. It is this "social philosophy" in outline that will concern us here.

## *The Last Chapter of Rizal's Fili*

Rizal regarded the *Fili* as superior to the *Noli* on account, not of its literary qualities, but of the depth of the thinking contained in it. Rizal's thought is at its deepest in the conversation Simoun and Padre Florentino carry on at the close of the novel. Simoun has just ingested poison; with his life ebbing away, he starts a question, which the priest finishes for him: (Simoun) "Is it the will of God that these islands..."

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<sup>1</sup> José Rizal, *El Filibusterismo* [1891] (Reprint, Manila: Instituto Histórico Nacional, 1996).

(P. Florentino) "...continue in this state which they much bewail?" P. Florentino ponders the question, says he has no answer, then proceeds to reaffirm his faith in God, in the God who does not abandon those who suffer injustice and place their trust in Him. If God be such a God, retorts Simoun, then why did He not bestow success upon my efforts to destroy the Spanish government? P. Florentino's rejoinder: Because you incited people to hatred. "Only love can accomplish marvelous works, only virtue can save." Simoun shoots back: But what about the many innocents who suffer; why did God not bring success to my efforts for their sake? P. Florentino: When a people suffer persecution, that suffering could be providence in disguise. He continues: A government's vices (its viciousness) inevitably destroys it, but the society that practices those same vices are just as inevitably destroyed. Simoun asks: "What is to be done then?" P. Florentino responds: "Suffer and work." Simoun retorts: "What sort of a God is this [who allows the innocent to suffer]!"

P. Florentino's argument may be summed up as follows. Our suffering is punishment for "our lack of faith, our vices, the slight value we give to dignity, to the civic virtues." In this suffering, however, consists our redemption, for by means of it God challenges us to be what we should be. Freedom could not be won by the sword because it is a gift bestowed by God upon those that deserve it, because they have permitted reason to rule in their lives, have consistently upheld the dignity of everyone, and have demonstrated that their love of the just, the good, and the great is such that, to see that these are attained, they would risk even their lives. Those who fail to come up to this standard God does not set free.

Rizal's reading of his countrymen seems to have been prescient. Barely a year following their breakaway from Spain in 1898, for reasons Rizal's "theology" of history appears to have correctly framed, they were again in thrall, to the United States. Given their independence in 1946, they lost it anew in 1972, to martial rule. In 1986, following the long, dark years of the dictatorship, it looked like, finally, they had ignited in themselves a passion, not for the sword, but for justice; a respect, not for might, but for reason. Rizal's words, at long last, were resonant: "God supplies the arms, and the idols, the tyrants fall like a house of cards, and freedom shines with the first light of dawn." Today, however, we are not so confident. Of February

1986 (EDSA I), we say today: "*Parang walang nangyari.*" It is what we say as well of January 2001 (EDSA II): "*Parang walang nangyari.*" Rizal's other pronouncement resounds in our minds:

Why give them freedom? With or without Spain they would always be the same, and perhaps, perhaps worse! What is the use of independence if the slaves of today become the tyrants of tomorrow? And they will be without a doubt, because he loves tyranny who submits to it!<sup>2</sup>

For as long as his countrymen persisted in their lack of civic sense, Rizal was convinced they could not truly be free.

### *Rizal's Understanding of Freedom*

A philosophical reading of the last chapter of the *Fili* allows two matters to come to surface: (a) in what the readiness for freedom consists, and (b) by what means the Filipino at the end of the nineteenth century may get himself ready. To better understand what Rizal meant by *freedom* or *libertad*, we shall turn to the notes that on December 12, 1896 he wrote to his counsel, from his prison cell:

Many have taken my phrase, "to have freedoms," to mean, "to have independence," but these are two different things. A people can be free without being independent, and a people can be independent without being free.

I have always wanted freedoms for the Philippines, and I have always expressed myself to that effect. Those who claim that I have said "independence" either mistake the radish for its leaves, or they lie. To be sure, I have also always believed that autonomy would come little by little, and independence with the passage of time...I have also believed that, if Spain were to systematically deny the Philippines liberties, it would have to face insurrections; I have said as much in writing, though I lament the prospect of it [violence] and certainly do not look forward to it. All this I had in mind when I spoke of the necessity of maintaining a certain uprightness, and of seeking to be united, so that when

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

events occur, we do not fall into the hands of Japan or England or Germany.<sup>3</sup>

In this passage, Rizal plays upon the distinction, worthy of a philosopher, between “tener libertades” and “tener independencia,” encapsulated in the apothegm: a people can be free without being independent, and a people can be independent without being free. Rizal’s remarks to his counsel notwithstanding, the phrase, “tener libertades,” occurs not once in the conversation between Simoun and P. Florentino, whereas the word, “libertad” (the term in the singular), occurs seven times. The word, when it does occur, could be construed to mean “independence,” though the word, “independencia” occurs only once. It is possible, of course, that Rizal is performing the semantic equivalent of a sleight of hand to get off the Spanish hook. In view, however, of the distinction Rizal makes between “libertad” and “independencia,” this is unlikely. For on this distinction rests Rizal’s deepest conviction that independence without freedom is paltry and that our greatest desire ought to center upon freedom, accompanied or not by independence.

“Libertad” in the plural (“libertades”) recalls to mind the English “civil liberties”: “the freedom of a citizen to exercise customary rights, as of speech or assembly, without unwarranted or arbitrary interference by the government” (*Random House Dictionary*). To be sure, this dictionary meaning forms part of Rizal’s meaning, though it is not all of it, because when P. Florentino characterizes freedom as “God’s cause,” he is thinking of much more than “customary rights.” “Libertad,” in his view, consists in the exercise of certain “inalienable rights,” of certain “human rights” that derive from the fact of being human. “Libertad” and the exercise of civil liberties, in this sense, are coterminous and need not always be accompanied by self-governance or formal political independence (e.g. Puerto Rico, Hawaii). At the same time, Rizal calls independence the fruit of freedom, indeed, the *necessary* fruit of freedom and not the other way around.

<sup>3</sup> José Rizal, “Datos para mi defensa.” In *Escritos políticos e históricos* (Manila: Comisión del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961), p. 333.

### *Meriting Freedom*

So what steps must Filipinos take to establish *libertad* or the practices of freedom among themselves? The answer proffered by P. Florentino is: elevate (*elevant*) reason and the dignity of each individual; cultivate in the heart of each one such a love of the just, the good, and the great that he or she would lay down his or her life in order that these might be attained. Rizal's meaning is clarified at the conclusion of P. Florentino's long speech, with the priest's characterization of three types of Filipinos ill-deserving of the benefits of civil liberty:

In the meantime, while the Filipino people does not have sufficient energy to proclaim, head raised and chest bared, their right to social life and to guarantee it with sacrifice, with their own blood; while we see our countrymen privately feeling ashamed hearing the voice of conscience roaring in rebellion and protest, but publicly joining the abuser in mocking the abused; while we see them enclose themselves in their egoism and praise with a forced smile the most wicked acts, begging with their eyes for a part of the booty, why give them freedom?<sup>4</sup>

Who are these Filipinos, upon whom Rizal appears to be coming down hard? The first, P. Florentino tells us, is the one who "does not have sufficient energy" to defend his rights; he is the picture of *acedia*, or sloth. Another is the Filipino who, while possessed of a well-formed conscience, pays scarce attention to its promptings, capitulating instead to others' expectations; he is the picture of weakness and timorousness. Another such Filipino is the one who, driven by his own egotism, converts everything life has to offer into an opportunity for personal gain; he is the picture of malice. Standing before these "types," each one seemingly worse than the one before, one stands in the presence of Rizal's version of Dante's descent into hell. As much as reason might instill in each one the knowledge of the right course of action, it is knowledge that is shoved aside, utterly disregarded. The just, the good, the great, are simply either not loved or are not loved enough. When Rizal, through P. Florentino, talks about "elevating" reason and the dignity of the individual, we must understand "*elevant*"

<sup>4</sup> *Filibusterismo* p. 284.

in the sense of “giving greater value to” reason and human dignity (one’s own, above all) than to a peaceful life (albeit at the expense of one’s countrymen or one’s own dignity as a human being), security, or life itself.

Let us take a closer look at P. Florentino’s assertion pertaining to the cultivation of a passion for the just, the good, and the great. The passion for “the great” recalls to mind the Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsyche*. When Basilio declines Simoun’s urgings that they work together to subvert the Spanish crown, on the excuse that he needs to apply himself more to his medical studies, Simoun chides him: he who becomes a great physician, “would be even *greater* [were he] to infuse new life into this anemic people! [italics mine]” ... “[w]hat are you doing for the country that brought you into existence, that gives you life and provides you with knowledge? Do you not know that a life not consecrated to a great idea is useless?”<sup>5</sup> *Greatness*, in Rizal’s view, consists in the service of the common good. Simoun continues: “The greatness [“grandeza”] of man does not reside in anticipating his time ... but rather in divining its desires, responding to its needs and guiding it forward.”<sup>6</sup> The three objects of the citizenly quest mentioned by P. Florentino increase both in intensity (from justice, which gives others their due, to goodness, which gives others what is beyond their due) and in scope (from goodness, which benefits specific individuals, to greatness, which benefits all of society). “Hasta morir por el” expresses one’s total self-commitment to the quest.

We must take all this into account today because indications are that, in our own time, we are a long way still from the full establishment of a civil society. Francisco Tatad writes:

Out on the streets, every driver behaves as though he had a duty to run over pedestrians. He does not read or observe traffic signs. In unlit and unmanned intersections, he picks the best place to create a logjam. Since his way is blocked, he does his best to block others. On the highway, slow-moving cars, which should be using the outer lane, use the inner lane, while fast-moving cars, which should be using the inner lane, use the outer lane. They ignore all road signs, and the highway patrol seems not to mind at all.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

In intellectual discourse, whether in the universities or in the media, few friends can disagree on any issue and still remain friends. Rare, if not unheard of, is the so-called pundit who can argue a point without damning the person who takes a contrary position ...

In politics, we vote for candidates we do not know, on the basis of opinions allegedly expressed in popularity surveys by unknown individuals who do not know the candidates either. We have become so vulnerable to psychological conditioning by pollsters and the media, none of whom is politically neutral, that we swallow everything they tell us, hook, line and sinker.<sup>7</sup>

There is more to this harsh picture:

A poor country may look poor, but it should not look dirty at all. A country that cannot collect its garbage; that allows its highways, avenues, and thoroughfares to be polluted with vulgar, obscene, and just plain ugly, billboards; and allows condemned buildings to remain as eyesores; that allows the greedy rich to build on every open space, while the poor build basketball courts in the middle of busy side streets; that allows roads, bridges, buildings, ports, airports, light-rail transport systems, and other examples of public infrastructure to be inaugurated before work on them is even completed, which then to go to seed soon after in their unfinished state; that allows huge malls to rise in the busiest parts of the metropolis without being required to build their own access roads and other amenities—such a country cannot claim to be serious; and its government cannot claim to be in charge.<sup>8</sup>

One hundred and thirteen years since the *Fili* first came out, it behooves us to give its diagnosis of Philippine society a second look.

### Sufrir

How does one transform a vitiated society into a civil society? P. Florentino's answer is simple: "Sufrir y trabajar." Simoun, who recoils

<sup>7</sup> Francisco S. Tatad, *Power without Authority: Crisis and Conflict in the Presidency* (Manila: Icon Press, Inc., 2003), pp. 87-88.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

at the mere mention of the word, “sufrir,” asks: “What sort of God is this [that would have us “suffer”?]. P. Florentino responds:

A most just God ... a God who punishes us for our lack of faith, for our vices, for the slight value we give to dignity, to civic virtues ... We tolerate and become accomplices of vice, sometimes we applaud it, it is only fair, very fair that we suffer its consequences and that our children suffer them, too.<sup>9</sup>

“Sufrir” is to suffer the consequences of the accommodation to vice conscious precisely of the fact that one’s sufferings spring from one’s accommodations to vice. It is to do penance for our sins. Rizal is not affected by commonplace notions of colonialism. The colonized, in his view, are not always the victims of the colonizers. They may be their own victims. It is “*our* vices, the slight value *we* give to dignity, to civic virtues,” that subject us to ruination. If the fictional town of San Diego (which is emblematic of the Filipino communities of Rizal’s own day), is incapable of being a civil society, the culprit is not Spanish oppression, but Filipino venality and shortsightedness. P. Florentino goes on to characterize God as the God of freedom:

Who obliges us to love freedom by making the yoke weigh upon us; a God of mercy, of fairness, who improves us at the same time that he punishes us, and only grants well-being to those who merit it through their efforts: the school of suffering tempers, the combat arena strengthens souls.<sup>10</sup>

If anything can put us on the road to ethical transformation, it would be *sufrir*. It does not come easy. How, for example, does one explain to a Cablesang Tales, a Placido Penitente, a Basilio, or an Ibarra that they have only themselves to blame for their own suffering?

### Trabajar

P. Florentino does not furnish us any explanation of what he means by work, doubtless because we do not need one. “Trabajar”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

means what it ordinarily means, a citizen's means of livelihood, the means ordinarily at his and society's disposal to generate wealth. This may seem out of place against the noble transports of P. Florentino's discourse, but material prosperity does play an important part in Rizal's political thought. In his notes to his counsel, he writes:

I believed and believe that a people cannot have civil liberties without first having material prosperity; to have civil liberties without anything to eat is the same as listening to speeches on an empty stomach.<sup>11</sup>

Work, then, has a civic dimension as well, to which Basilio specifically refers in chapter 7, upon being accused by Simoun of doing nothing for the country:

I do not watch from the side. I work as everyone does to raise from the ruins of the past a people whose individuals will practice solidarity with one another and feel each in himself an awareness and the life of the totality. But ... in the great factory of society the division of labor should exist; I have picked my task and dedicate myself to science.<sup>12</sup>

Work, in Rizal's view, weaves the separate threads that individual citizens are into the single fabric society should be. This is an important point. We tend to think of national unity as having to be based on an idea accepted by all, but Rizal was much more down-to-earth: national unity would be achieved through the experience of working together in commerce and industry. His notes to his counsel constantly link unity and economic development when he talks of the aims of the Liga Filipina.

### *Sufrir y trabajar*

P. Florentino chides Simoun for fostering "rottenness in society without sowing a single idea." He holds that one does not solve a

<sup>11</sup> "Datos para mi defensa," p. 333.

<sup>12</sup> *Filibusterismo*, p. 50.

problem by exacerbating it, by working it up to a fever pitch, because the elicited reaction is usually extreme, which serves merely to compound the problem. P. Florentino proposes instead the complete release from the morally repulsive situation, a zero tolerance for it. How? Through ideas. Why? Because the idea is severed from space and time, and it is only from a perspective severed from space and time that someone may analyze and judge the situation of space and time he is caught in. We understand, then, the importance for Rizal of the elevation of reason, of study, of thought, of philosophy. It is here that philosophy intersects with political responsibility. Only from the atemporal can the temporal be changed.

One particular idea that serves as the key to leave the prison is “redemption presupposes virtue.”<sup>13</sup> When vices of every stripe and magnitude operate unchecked in a community, that community can hardly expect to prosper. “Like government, like people,” says P. Florentino. “To an immoral government corresponds a people without morals, to an administration without conscience, greedy and servile citizens in the town, bandits and thieves in the mountains!” P. Florentino could well have rested his claim upon Simoun’s proposal relating to the slaughter of all rulers and of all those who decline the invitation to participate in the revolution. The resultant society could hardly be described as virtuous; how could it, coming on the heels of a bloodbath motivated by vice and hatred. “Hatred creates nothing more than monsters,” exclaims P. Florentino. “Only love accomplishes works of marvel.”

Rizal, clearly, has changed his mind about the strategy outlined earlier in the *Noli*, that fount of hatred towards the friars. The transformative power of suffering is the climax of the *Noli*. It is everywhere in the *Fili*, as witness the cases of Cablesang Tales, Placido Penitente, and Basilio. In all these cases, however, suffering is followed by anger; only at the end of the *Fili* is it proposed that suffering be followed instead by work—not work for revolution, or Simoun would not have reacted as he did, not work in some underground movement, but work as we know it in everyday life. Why? Rizal sees anger as implicitly excluding the angry person from the cause of the

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 282.

misery he suffers from. Rizal, however, saw everyone implicated in the evil a society suffered from (“Tal amo, tal esclavo. Tal gobierno, tal país.”); change in society consequently involves everyone, and the change cannot be purely external but must in fact be primarily internal. The instrument of change Rizal proposes is work.

P. Florentino alludes twice to the power of action to reveal the idea that motivated it. This power, of course, does not reside solely in dramatic actions, such as the suffering of the just and the upright that he specifically mentions, but in any and all actions, even the humblest. This brings us to the action that takes up most of the citizen's time—work. The virtuous citizen's work would embody love, self-sacrifice, and virtue. In fact, it would not only be the citizen's work, but the citizen himself and the very product of his work that would embody all of these values, putting them in currency in society. It is their having witnessed that work that brings his fellow citizens to imitate the virtuous citizen. As suffering brings about the redemption of the individual, so, too, work brings about the redemption of the people. When the majority of the citizens of a society are persons of virtue, then we have a civil society. If we represent civil society with any positive number, the process to it starts not from zero, but from a negative number—the situation of vice. *Sufrir* takes the individual citizen to point zero; *trabajar* takes the citizens at point zero to the positive number that is civil society.

The difference between the *Fili* and the *Noli* from a philosophical point of view is the difference between P. Florentino and Filosofo Tasio. Rizal's choice of a Filipino secular priest to enunciate the principles of his political philosophy is no accident. In the last chapter of the *Fili*, we witness a volte-face: Rizal's return from Madrid's La Central to Manila's UST. If we could rewrite Basilio's story following P. Florentino's reply to Simoun, we would not have Basilio searching Simoun out upon his release from prison; we would have him, rather, going back to his books. Such a story, of course, would never make it to Hollywood, and Basilio would come out looking like a wimp. Yet this is Rizal's own story, his story in Dapitan. What was Rizal up to in Dapitan? Basically, he worked, and never once hatched up a plot against the government. The *Noli* and the *Fili* together make up Rizal's autobiography. Of course, while our version of Basilio may never make it to the silver screen, it would be the perfect material for

a Dostoyevsky (which unfortunately Rizal was not). It would not be misplaced to use the vocabulary of Christian asceticism to describe the process of the suffering citizen's *metanoia*: suffering leads to self-examination, self-examination to contrition, contrition to a purpose of amendment, and the purpose of amendment to P. Florentino's aforementioned qualifications for freedom.

The anthropological and theological ground that underlies P. Florentino's advice is given in quick strokes in chapter 33, the chapter in which Simoun apprises Basilio of his plan to blow up Philippine society's high and mighty at Paulita Gomez's wedding reception. The narrator, who could be none other than Rizal, then comments:

Instead of replying that the most evil or most pusillanimous man is always something more than a plant, because he has a soul and an intelligence that, no matter how vitiated or brutalized, can be redeemed; instead of answering that man has no right to dispose of anyone's life for the benefit of someone else, and that the right to life resides in each individual like the right to freedom and light; instead of replying that, if it is abuse in governments to punish the guilty for faults or crimes which they have committed out of negligence or ineptitude, so much more would it be for a man, whether powerful or miserable, to punish an unfortunate people for the faults of its governments and ancestors; instead of saying that only God can use such means, that God can destroy because he can create, God who has in his hands the capacity to reward, eternity and the future to justify his acts while man does not; instead of these arguments, Basilio opposed only a vulgar observation: "What will the world say on seeing such carnage?"<sup>14</sup>

Rizal recognizes the existence of a moral order, sees it as inscribed in the very nature of the human being, and grounds it in the human being's Creator. Of the four statements that make up this critique of Simoun's nihilism, the first is of particular interest. It refers to the redeemability of all human beings. This lies at the root of Rizal's rejection of hatred on the one hand, and his doctrine of love as a motor of change on the other. The love that redeems, according to Rizal, is not

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-51.

simply love of one's people (no one can accuse Simoun of not having loved his country), but love of justice, goodness, and total disinterested service; it is, in short (insofar as it refuses to degrade human beings), the love of persons as persons, including, it would seem, of the friars.

Rizal's idiom is that of the Scholastics and Aristotle. In today's idiom, to echo Rizal, we would say vice (of which hatred is paradigmatic) deforms the human person, whereas virtue (of which love is Rizal's supreme example) transforms him. This is the principle that rules Rizal's political philosophy. What is the link between love and virtue? Love leads to sacrifice: sacrifice of oneself for others. Sacrifice in turn transforms the citizen's constant choice of others over self into a stable disposition, in short, into virtue.

What are the sources of Rizal's political philosophy in the *Fili*? I believe it is "real life." The point about Filipinos not being ready for a life with civil liberties was something he learned observing Filipinos in Madrid, with their gambling and womanizing and propensity to play hooky. That Filipinos display the mentality of both tyrant and slave he knew from personal observation, and from the news that now and then he received from his family of events in Calamba. The transforming power of suffering he could see was at work in his family as they were being persecuted by the authorities in the Calamba land case. The importance of work to the development of society was something he came to appreciate in Europe. And the effectiveness of personal example was something he experienced the first time he returned to the Philippines in 1887: he felt he had accomplished much more in those seven months in Calamba than in his five years in Europe. Their grounding in his personal life is doubtlessly the reason why these points of political philosophy were so passionately argued by him in the *Fili*, his notes to his counsel, and the manifesto in which he condemned the 1896 revolution. It is a political philosophy that came to maturity in the course of his crisis with Marcelo del Pilar in 1891, and remained substantively intact till his death five years later. But Rizal had no professional training in philosophy and so there are gaps around his espousal of these points. Perhaps it is more exact to say we have the raw material for a political philosophy in Rizal's later writings. They await others to work on them.

*Rizal A Century Later*

Were Rizal to comment on the outcome of our recently concluded general elections, he might say we ought to have more assiduously interrogated the candidates on (a) their strategy for beating poverty, and (b) their strategy for solving corruption, and to have made our choices on the basis of what we found out. But he might say as well, as many do today, “general elections do not matter.” If he did, it would not be an express cynicism, because, in his view, what matters above all is that civil society be operational. The question of *who rules* matters less.

Can we say we have a civil society today at the national level? If the criteria for determining whether a national civil society exists are Rizal’s conditions for deserving freedom, then the answer would have to be no. Do we as a people elevate reason? I do not know whether we cultivate, say in our major newspapers, a public understanding of issues. I do not know whether we would all swear by the dignity of the individual. Our ranking in the corruption index would appear to say not. Do we as a people love the just, the good, and the great to the point that we would sacrifice ourselves for them? The way we conducted ourselves during the worst days of the Asian crisis as opposed to the way in which South Koreans, Thais, and Malaysians conducted themselves in their own countries, deals us a resounding no.

Could we say we have a civil society at the local level? There, of course, is where “civil society” ceases to be mere theory, where we must come face to face with roads, garbage, car drivers, pedestrians, shop owners, street vendors, and that ubiquitous admonition against indiscriminate male urination. The failure of the two People Power revolutions to transform Philippine society provides an answer to our question. There is something ingenuous about People Power demonstrations directed at presidents, while city mayors who receive their cut of the budget related to every construction project carried out in their city, or provincial governors who arrange for the assassination of their political rivals, are tolerated. Can we in fact imagine a People Power demonstration against a mayor of Metro Manila? Would the masses be there? Would there not be a real danger of violence from goons? I am not suggesting that any of the mayors currently serving

Metro Manila should be denounced in a popular demonstration. I am simply asking, would there be mass support for the indictment of a Metro Manila mayor, on the scale of a People Power demonstration?

Self-government, claims Rizal, is the natural fruit of civil society, and "self-government" means at its most literal "government by the people." Civil society eventually ends up being a democracy. Our situation in the Philippines, however, has not followed this pattern. We have imposed the shell of a democratic national government upon hundreds of local communities (counting *barangays* among these, of course) that are accurately described as "traditionally political" or "trapo." Traditional political communities, far from being the civil societies Rizal describes, are survivors of our pre-Hispanic past. Sociologists tell us they are organized along patron-client lines; student activists of my college days referred to them as "feudal"; older historians remarked on their paternalism; I like to call them *maginoo/alipin* societies after Rizal's tyrant/slave distinction. We take it for granted that communities at the pre-national level need not be civil societies, while we demand the formation of a genuine civil society at the national level. Today, as at the last general elections, there is much talk about voter education, but one never hears of this in relation to local elections.

Is it possible to erect a democracy on the foundations of feudalistic communities? I submit that to try to do so would be to write on water, as the Tagalogs would say. The failure of the People Power Revolutions to provoke a change in political culture resoundingly reminds us that far more urgent than building a national civil society is building local civil societies.

Allow me to make a summary of Rizal's thought with regard to freedom and civil society. Freedom is a life with civil liberties. This life is genuinely lived only when citizens have learned to elevate reason and human dignity and to love the just, the good, and the great to the point of death. When this is not so in a particular society, then the members of that society eventually suffer. It is then that the citizen must realize that his own vices or toleration of vices have brought about this situation. The citizen must undergo an interior change. He must subsequently work and work well to bring about material prosperity, national unity, and the ethical transformation of his fellow citizens.

Rizal discusses none of these as though they were the responsibility of citizens. He refers to them rather as his “dreams.” Today, however, when much gloom over the country’s future envelops people’s hearts, Rizal’s “Sufrir y trabajar” and his vision of a civil society has every appearance of a political responsibility—the responsibility of every enlightened citizen in our republic. It is a strange responsibility because it is not a responsibility to an existing *polis*, but to one in the process of becoming. This fits our historical situation which is precisely that—a nation in progress, a people in the process of becoming. Philosophical arguments could be easily mustered to characterize this responsibility as human rather than political. At the heart of the concept of responsibility is that of accountability, answering to someone for something. In a nation *in fieri* we answer to the persons we live with insofar as they are persons for their well-being which becomes our concern because they are persons and so are we.

Prior to the *polis* there is simply society. In Rizal’s view, society is a network of relationships in which there is no one who can claim isolation from any other; everyone is implicated; everyone affects everyone else. There is evidence Rizal had grasped this early in life, long before what we might call his nationalistic phase which began in 1888 with his annotations to Morga. Simoun mouths nationalism before Basilio, but we sense by the end of the *Fili* that Rizal has had him do this so that he can be rejected. Simoun’s nationalism is exclusivist, and exclusivism, P. Florentino would have said, is a telltale sign of its roots in hatred, not love. There is no responsibility to hate, but there is one to love.

*Dónde está la juventud que ha de consagrar sus rosadas horas, sus ilusiones y entusiasmo al bien de su patria?*

Where is the youth that should consecrate their rosy hours, their dreams and enthusiasm to the good of the fatherland? Where are they who should pour their blood generously to wash away so much shame, so many crimes, such abomination? Pure and spotless must the victim be for the holocaust to be acceptable! [284–85]

This is Fr. Florentino's famous apostrophe following his long speech. Rizal thought that a civil society would take years to bring about.

Where are you, o young men and women, who have to incarnate the vigor of life that has fled our veins, the purity of ideas that have been stained in our brains and the fire of enthusiasm that has died out in our hearts? [285]

Rizal discounts his own generation, the generation we are accustomed to venerate as heroes—so bleak was his reading of it in 1891. The apostrophe ends plaintively: “Come because we await you.” There is no avoiding the long haul, and that is the reason why, among the defects that Filipinos must atone for is their “lack of faith.” In the context of the closing scene of the *Fili*, “lack of faith” can only refer to God. Our lack of faith accounts for our facile recourse to quick solutions, but in the long run the quick solutions of anger, hatred, violence, slander, and crime will not work; it is only the slower solutions we have examined at length that will.

Despite the lugubrious lighting and the accompanying cello music that would be appropriate to the end of the *Fili* were it ever to be turned into a movie, Rizal's philosophy is essentially optimistic: all men are redeemable and the redemption of an entire society can be initiated by anyone in the simplest of ways—*sufrir y trabajar*. The redeemer Rizal presents us with is the man of virtue whom he characterizes as master of his own destiny, as opposed to the man of vice, the creature of circumstance. Jesus Christ, whose divinity Rizal denied at this time, seems to be his paradigm. Earlier I expressed skepticism over the theological character of the end of the *Fili*, but we would do less than justice to banish God completely from Rizal's picture. God is present as Providence, in place of the *Noli's* Progress; He is present as the One Who grounds the moral principles that motivate Rizal to reject Simoun's anarchism. Such a God collaborates with human beings to bring about civil society. ↻

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17

