

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*JGLi*) – A newly launched book on Philippine national hero Jose Rizal has raised an unpleasant but long forgotten past that had placed the Roman Catholic Church at the receiving end.

The anthology, “Remembering Rizal, Voices From the Diaspora,” edited by Edwin Agustin Lozada (Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc., San Francisco, 2011), featured two topics by Filipino American Gil C. Fernandez – “Rizal’s Alleged Retraction” and “Rizal’s Religious Beliefs.”

The book launch coordinated by Ms. Almira Astudillo Gilles was held last Thursday (July 14) at the Instituto Cervantes at 31 W. Ohio, Chicago, Illinois. Consul General Leo M. Herrera-Lim of the Philippine Consulate General delivered opening remarks. Among those in the audience were Dr. Ramon G. Lopez, the great grand-nephew of Dr. Rizal, who resides at the Chicago area, Deputy Consul General Orontes V. Castro, Vice Consul Alena Grace S. Borra, and Berth Salvador, Consulate's cultural officer and artists Fred De Asis and Willi Red Buhay.

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The book was described as “everything: scholarly, journalistic and creative writing (essays, poetry, plays) and original artwork by adults and youth contributors from all over the world.” Copies will be available later in Chicago through the Knights of Rizal and the University of the Philippines Alumni Association.

The retraction was an alleged document in Spanish purportedly signed by Dr. Rizal, rejecting Masonry (“I abominate Masonry) and a repudiation of “anything in my words, writings, publications, and conduct that has been contrary to my character as a son of the Catholic Church” together with the statement, “I believe and profess what it teaches and I submit to what it demands.”

“THERE WAS NO DOCUMENT”

“The trouble with this document that was allegedly signed few hours before Rizal’s execution,” retired Civil Engineer and Filipino American Fernandez said, “there was no such document.”

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“Dr. Rizal had been imprisoned in Fort Bonifacio since Nov. 3, 1896. Why did the friars try to have Rizal retracted only on Dec. 29th around 11:30 p.m. a few hours before his execution as narrated by Father (Vicente) Balaguer, (S. J.)?”

Mr. Fernandez quoted from his account in the 320-page book that was part of continuing series on the commemoration of Rizal’s sesquicentennial this year that “(t)he text of the alleged retraction was published immediately in the newspapers in Manila after Rizal was killed, thus making it impossible for Rizal to deny or affirm the alleged retraction since a ‘dead man tells no tale.’”

The alleged retraction was published in Diario de Manila, El Espanol, El Comercio, La Oceania Espanola and La Voz Espanola. The newspapers inserted the text of the alleged retraction but not the photograph of the alleged document “because at that time there was no document yet,--either forged or genuine.”

The alleged retracted document would surface in 1935 or 39 years later purportedly discovered by Filipino priest Fr. Manuel A. Garcia at the Archbishop of Manila.

In 1958, Filipino historian Teodoro A. Agoncillo proposed that the recovered retracted document be submitted to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) of the United States for scientific analysis to determine the authenticity.

CATHOLIC CHURCH CHALLENGED

While Dr. Eugene A. Hessel, a professor on New Testament at Union Theological Seminary at Dasmariñas, Cavite in the Philippines, published a piece in the Silliman Journal in 1965, "Rizal's Retraction: A Note on the Debate," challenging the Catholic Church to have the handwritings of the recovered document authenticated by a "neutral, scientific analysis of a government bureau in some neutral country such as Switzerland or Sweden."

But there was no response from both proposals from the Roman Catholic Church.

Fernandez likened Rizal's alleged retraction to an inquisition by the Church to Galileo Galilei, who was ordered by the Church to be placed under house arrest for heresy. Galileo contradicted the view of the Church that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the planetary system.

In 2000, Pope John Paul, who was beatified last January, issued a formal apology to Galileo for the Church's mistake.

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Fernandez believes Rizal did not sign the retraction document, saying that “Rizal believed that the will of God is different from that of the priest: that religiousness does not consist of long periods spent on your knees.

He added Rizal believed that miracles were created to fool the people (as Rizal wrote in the “Letter to the Women of Malolos”).

Although Rizal believed in the existence of God, in his April 4, 1893 letter to Father Pastells, Rizal wrote that his “faith in God is blind,” meaning Rizal was an agnostic “since an agnostic does not know.”

CHURCH IS NOT INFALLIBLE

Fernandez added that Rizal did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ when Christ was nailed to a cross as a man; Rizal did not intend to destroy the Catholic Church but desired its practices more consistent with the fundamental tenets of Christianity. Rizal rejected the Catholic Church claim of infallibility as later proven by Pope John Paul’s apology to Galileo after almost 400 years since the heresy was committed;

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Rizal gave the greatest importance to human capacity to reason and his Christianity did not rely on friar orders; neither did he follow mandatory performance of religious rituals, sacraments and ceremonies; and Rizal was a mason.

As damage control and fearing a backlash, the Roman Catholic Church went to work feverishly a few hours before Jose Rizal was executed in Bagumbayan later known as Luneta in Manila in the

Philippines

to secure a hand written assurance from Dr. Rizal that he was not renouncing his Catholic Faith.

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Editor's Note: To contact the author, please e-mail him at: (lariosa_jos@sbcglobal.net)

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