

JOSE RIZAL: PATRIOT, SCHOLAR, DOCTOR, & FREEMASON 1861-1896

Researched and supplemented by: Herbert G. Gardiner, PGS, Grand Historian, Grand Lodge Free & Accepted Masons of Hawaii

Jose Protacio Rizal Mercado Alonso Realonda, better known to the world as Jose Rizal, was a Freemason. He represented the quintessence of Filipino patriotism during the waning years of the Spanish rule and the influence of the Catholic Church in the Philippines.

Dr. Rizal was born on June 19, 1861, in Calumba, Laguna, and executed in the prime of his life by a squad of the 10th Spanish Infantry Regiment by being shot in the back at 7:00 a.m. on December 30, 1896 at the Campo de Bagumbayan located directly behind the Luneta in Manila. His execution was scheduled for 8:00 a.m. but it was secretly advanced 1 hour by the Spanish authorities to avoid any demonstration or possibly an uprising by the Filipino populace.

After 300 years of oppressive rule by Spain and the Catholic Church, in 1896, the Filipinos began what became an all-out revolt against Spain and the church.

You may well ask what was Rizal's crime? He was executed for trying to lift the yoke of oppression by the Spanish Colonial government and the friars from his Filipino countrymen. He did not encourage sedition against Spain, but wanted more humane treatment of his countrymen mainly by the friars and to a lesser extent by the Spanish Colonial Administrators. He advocated political, clerical, and land acquisition reforms. In essence, he wanted an end to the discrimination, exploitation, and persecution of his Filipino countrymen.

With the opening of the Suez Canal the travel time to Spain was reduced from four months to one month. It resulted in many liberal Spaniards going to the Philippines and eventually many Filipinos going to Spain and Europe. It was the Filipinos who benefited the most as they were able to cast off the bonds that restricted them in the Philippines, acquire a good education, and learn about the various European countries. Among those Filipinos who ventured abroad were young patriots like Jose Rizal, and Marcelo Del Pilar.

The decade that followed the 1872, mutiny at the Cavite Arsenal due to the imposition of a tribute imposed on the native Filipino workers, was peaceful, but it was a tense peace at best, one that was imposed by the sword. The mutiny had been ruthlessly crushed by the Spanish officials who were urged to take cruel action by the friars. The colonial administration, exhorted by the friars was deeply impressed with what they saw as their crucial role in maintaining a Castilian civilization which along with the influence of the friars, required complete sovereignty over the Colony and unquestionable submission by the Filipino people which included a ban on Freemasonry.

The educated Filipinos eventually became prime targets of persecution by the government and the church because they recognized the corruption and oppressive practices and raised very embarrassing questions. It was they who paid for the extravagant living and excesses of their Spanish overlords. It was the emerging intelligentsia who now became the victims of persecution by the church and the government.

At the age of 21, Jose Rizal completed his scholastic career in Manila and in 1882, went to Spain and acquired his degree as a Doctor of Medicine, and also a license to practice Philosophy and the Fine Arts. During his stay in Spain, Rizal became a Master Mason in Acacia Lodge No. 9 in 1884. He later moved to France where he became a specialist in diseases of the eye. He also found time to join a French Masonic Lodge during his sojourn in France. In 1885, he went to Germany to study Schiller, after which he visited Austria. Jose Rizal became a cultured gentleman who was comfortable at all levels of society. He later settled in Belgium for a period where he wrote his highly celebrated novel, "Noli Me Tangere" in Spanish. The title is Latin for "Touch me not."

In his novel Jose Rizal exposed "conditions so sensitive in the Philippines, that they could not be touched by anybody." He unfolded a shocking tapestry of the Philippines that made his story the most influential political novel of that country in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In a letter to a friend, Rizal said: "The book contains things of which no one among ourselves has spoken up to the present, they are so delicate that they cannot be touched by anybody. Insofar, as I am concerned, I have tried to do what nobody likes to do. I have endeavored to answer the false and malicious charges which for centuries had been heaped on us and our country; I have described the social condition, our life, our beliefs, our hopes and desires, our grievances, our griefs; I have unmasked hypocrisy which, under the guise of religion, came to impoverish and brutalize us; I have distinguished the true religion from the false, from superstition, from that which traffics with the holy word to extract money, to make us believe in sorcery, of which Catholicism would be ashamed if it were aware of it....The facts I narrate are all true and actually happened; I can prove them."

Rizal's novel was an immediate success both in Spain and in the Philippines. Needless to say, the book was condemned and banned by the Colonial government and the Church. The friars maintained that if the Filipinos read the book they would be committing a mortal sin because it contained heresies and ideas contrary to our Holy Religion. Even though the book was banned, and most of the Filipinos were not literate in Spanish, the book became very popular.

When Jose Rizal returned to the Philippines shortly after his book was published he was warned by his relatives and the Spanish governor-general to leave the Philippines, because he was under continuous close surveillance, and so he returned to Spain. After Rizal departed from the Philippines his father and relatives were driven from the farm they were leasing from the Dominicans, and when they refused to vacate the lands their house were torched, and they were driven off the land at the point of a bayonet.

In 1891, Rizal published his second novel "El Filibusterismo" (The Subversive), a sequel to "Noli Me Tangere." In it he warned the Spanish authorities of an impending cataclysm unless

steps were taken to ameliorate the conditions suffered by the Filipinos. In a later essay "Filipinas Dentro de Cien Anos" (The Philippines Within A Century) Rizal predicted that The Philippines either will remain under Spain, but with more rights and freedom, or will declare herself independent, after staining herself and the Mother Country with her own blood."

When Rizal returned to the Philippines in 1892, he founded, "La Liga Filipina" (The Philippine League) an organization designed to bring about reforms in the government. By this time Jose Rizal had become anathema to the Spanish government and the friars; he was arrested and banished to Dapitan in Mindanaw. During the evening of the day the decree to banish Rizal was published, a handful of men took an oath to bind themselves into an association known in its short form as the "Katipunan" (Highest and Most Respectable Society of the Sons of the People).

The organization was founded by Andres Bonifacio a patriot and a Freemason of humble origin. The membership of the "Katipunan" was almost entirely plebian. "The Katipunan" advocated independence from Spain. Bonifacio conferred with Rizal on how to bring it about, but Rizal cautioned him to seek reforms rather than independence because the so-called middle class would not support a revolution. Rizal proved to be right, but Bonifacio managed to arouse the less wealthy Filipinos to support a revolution against Spain which began in 1896. The revolution was inspired and led largely by Freemasons.

The Spanish colonial government and the friars were wrongly convinced that Rizal was a member of the "Katipunan" which he was not. They were also of the opinion that the Filipino Freemasons and the "Katipunan" were one and the same, which they were not. However as a result, many Freemasons were imprisoned, tortured, exiled, and put to death because they were Freemasons.

Rizal eventually managed to get out of Dapitan to serve as a surgeon in the Spanish army in Cuba during the Spanish American War, and while traveling via Spain the Colonial authorities ordered his arrest and he was returned to the Philippines. After going through the ordeal of a sham trial of fraudulent charges, he was executed on December 30, 1896; the Philippine revolution had already begun in August of that year.

Unfortunately, it took a revolution initially led by Andres Bonifacio, and later by Emilio Aguinaldo, the Spanish-American War, the Filipino-American War, (also referred to as the Philippine Insurrection), World War II with the occupation of the Philippines by Imperial Japan, the retaking of the Philippines by the Armed Forces of the United States along with the Filipino and American Guerilla forces, and the formal surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, before the Republic of the Philippines became a reality on July 4, 1946.

It was only after the Philippines was out from under the yoke of Spain and the friars, and the occupation by the forces of Imperial Japan could Freemasonry begin to flourish. In 1912, the Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons was founded and at the present time there are close to 300 constituent Lodges with approximately 15,500 members.

Jose Rizal is often described as the George Washington of his country. He was a giant among men and is still revered 107 years after his death not only by the Filipino people, but by men and women around the world who cherish freedom.

Jose Rizal, Marcelo Del Pilar, and Emilio Aguinaldo are recognized by the Grand Lodge of the Philippines as the "Big Three" of Freemasonry in the Philippines. Along with Andres Bonifacio founder of the Katipunan, all of whom belong to the pantheon of great Filipino patriots.

In 1912, Rizal's family rejected a petition by the Jesuits to rebury the famous man. Instead the honor was given to the Freemasons. On December 12, 1912, the remains of Rizal were removed from his sister's home to the Masonic Temple in the Tondo section of Manila. Led by Sinukuan Lodge No. 305, several Lodges conducted a Masonic Service over the remains. The next morning the Freemasons in full regalia marched in procession to his sister's home where Rizal's remains were turned over to the government representatives. The remains were then taken to the legislative building where government officials also held funeral services before final internment at the Luneta.

There has been a controversy due to a claim by the Catholic Church that on the eve of his execution Rizal had reembraced the church. The evidence refutes the claim. During his trial no cleric came to the defense of Rizal. Church officials remained silent. Only many years after his execution when Jose Rizal became known as the "George Washington" of the Philippines did the Church make the claim.

Note: This paper was presented at the Philippine Consulate in 1999, by the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons of Hawaii on the 138th Anniversary of the birth of Jose Rizal. The paper has recently been revised by the Grand Historian.

References

1. A Short History of the Philippines by Teodora A. Agoncillo, 1969,
2. Votaries of Honor, by Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons of the Philippines