HISTORICAL ERRORS

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Landas 16:2 is a fine issue. May I, however, make a suggestion—that articles with a substantial part devoted to history, be read also by an historian. If the theological substance is based on incorrect or dubious history, the theological conclusions are undermined.

There are some really bad historical errors in the article by Rafael Dy-Liacco on pp. 213-17. No one has done more than I to expose American atrocities during the American-Filipino war (in my Revolutionary Clergy) and despite his errors and exaggerations, he does not say the half of what they were. But what he has is partly from one polluted source, and partly, I am afraid, from his own imagination.

His only published source, a book by Moorfield Storey and Julian Codman, major figures in the Anti-Imperialist League, were purely the work of propagandists, and cannot be relied on for even an accidental truth. Though Storey himself was often sincerely a promoter of humanitarian causes, he was part of a League, largely made up of what Americans call WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) who wanted to keep America that way. Without ever having been in the Philippines, they gathered all kinds of rumors and reports, true or not, that tended to support their case. Perhaps the
main financier was Andrew Carnegie, no lover of the poor and oppressed, whose millions came from the blood of workers in his steel mills. During a strike for higher wages at one of his steel plants in Homestead, Pennsylvania, he had 300 Pinkerton detectives brought in as strikebreakers, together with local police, resulting in the so-called “Homestead massacre,” which became a national scandal.

Historians, both American and Filipino, have shown that the main motive of most, if not all, of the Anti-Imperialists was far from love for Filipinos and their independence, but anxiety lest “mongrel Asians” (their term) be admitted into the lily-white American empire. In this they were fully supported by all Southern politicians, who wanted no more “niggers” (their term) joining those they felt themselves cursed with already. To use Storey’s book as a source is like asking Joma Sison to do an objective evaluation of the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

I know of no slightest evidence of any instance when “women and children were systematically wiped out” (not even by the monster, General Jacob H. Smith, in Samar). The assertion that 2,000,000 Filipinos were killed by the Americans is absurd. No one will ever know just how many were killed, as the war coincided with one of the worst cholera epidemics that afflicted the country from the last decades of Spanish rule—that of 1902—apart from other near-epidemic diseases accompanying the cholera. Though every life is sacred, one or 2,000,000, it was war, and the best scholarship of recent years puts war-related deaths far below a million. The figure of Bell for 1/3 of Luzon was something it was impossible for him to know at the time, and apart from Samar, very few Filipinos were killed outside Luzon. “Genocide” is a horrible thing. However if one knows its definition, the term is totally inapplicable here. Precisely, even the worst of the Americans wanted Filipinos alive, not “ethnically cleansed”—who else would work the fields, etc., for the US export economy to be promoted, and who would buy the manufactured goods to be imported from the US?
The best estimate for the Philippine population in 1899 was approximately 6.70 million (5.98 million in the last Spanish official census of 1887). If 2,000,000 Filipinos were killed by the Americans 1899-1902 (and perhaps as much as another half-million or more died from cholera in 1902) how did the 1903 census, the most accurate ever taken till that time, record 6.98 million—excluding the "wild people," i.e. non-Christians—as did the estimate of 1899? (In any case these "wild people" were almost entirely unaffected by the war.) Thus the total Filipino population, according to the 1903 census, adding in an estimated 650,000 "wild people," was some 7.63 million. Demographic history scarcely records anywhere such a hypothetical annual rate of population increase in spite of enormous deaths, as to make that even remotely imaginable.

That "Balangiga massacre" in Samar of the American garrison by bolo-wielding Filipinos is still a much disputed event, even as to its causes. But what is certain is that it was not bolos vs. guns, since the Americans were all eating breakfast and had left their guns behind. Only a few were able to hold off their attackers by throwing canned goods and jars of jam and kitchen utensils, until they could get their guns. They were therefore mostly unarmed, and only a few escaped by boat.

The "massacre of Bud Dajo" in 1906 in Jolo (not Mindanao) under General Leonard Wood and the unmentioned later one of Bud Bagsak under General John Pershing were, perhaps with some reason, much denounced in the US at the time, but they had nothing to do with the American-Filipino war. These "massacres" took place because of American efforts to make the Taosugs pay the cedula tax being paid by all other Filipinos, and because of Pershing's effort to disarm the Moros, as the Christians had been. The rebel Taosugs fortified themselves in their colitas (they were not "trapped") inside the craters of extinct volcanoes, practically impregnable to foot soldiers (largely Filipinos, including Moros, who had joined the Philippine Scouts of the U.S. Army), and vulnerable to some extent only by artillery (by which there was one, not three days bombardment, after the Scouts had dragged the guns up the mountain
against heavy Moro fire, boulders rolling down, etc.). The Taosug women fought next to the men in men's clothes, and children were used as human shields. The attack was made at all only after sending friendly Moros as intermediaries, but since those inside refused to surrender, most were killed—by the Scouts. I don't know either what happened to the little girl (who was not the only survivor), and I suspect she is the figment of someone's imagination.

I shall not comment on the theological value of the article, which is not my field. But its unsound historical background raises serious doubts.