REPLY TO “HISTORICAL ERRORS”

Rafael D. Dy-Liacco

F
Fr. Schumacher’s corrections are well taken. Establishing numerical figures for past events does require a multiplicity of sources and their weighing. His expertise in this is clear.

However, Fr. Schumacher’s assertion that the charge of genocide is not applicable is, I believe, still open to further discussion. This is also true for his dismissal of “tainted” sources.

My article is titled “When the Truth Hurts: Finding Hope for the Philippines from the Underside of History.” The underside of history consists of those voices that receive no hearing in the official story. These are the voices of those who do not count, the utterly defeated whose lives never figure in the stories of the victors. Hearing certain voices and preserving them, in whatever fashion and for whatever reason, sometimes requires a point of view that differs from one’s own.

In this regard, knowledgeable readers will recognize my article as being not only a theology “from below,” but also as being a theology of liberation. They will also recognize that its liberation theology is not transplanted from Latin America or Africa, but makes its point indigenously. Moreover, as the title indicates, it does this from the underside.
About genocide, as Fr. Schumacher rightly understands, there is no cut-off number below which such intended deaths are no longer genocidal. Now, in relation to this issue, I wish to make three points.

First, the claim that America committed genocide in the Philippines is not off the table. Second, the claim that the case on genocide is closed and that the outcome is "not guilty" is premature. One must not portray the first claim as beneath discussion and the second as transpired. Third, insisting on that portrayal shows that the interpretation of the Philippine story has for too long been a matter of the defeated having to bear the biases of the victors. What is told characteristically placates the defeated yet still upholds their status as a defeated people.

The first two points can be dealt with simultaneously. A cursory search of the Internet using the search engine Google and the key words "genocide" and "Philippine-American" yields 231 hits (19 Nov. 2002). Even allowing for multiple hits of the same web site, as happens when the site contains different pages that contain the same set of key words, this simple search shows that on this most public level: 1) the charge of genocide has been widely made, and 2) the discussion is still on-going; the case is not closed—unless one wishes to de-legitimize all voices that differ from one's own. One of the sites is edited by scholar Jim Zwick, who believes that genocide occurred (see http://www.BoondocksNet.com).

Finally, when one denounces with grief the atrocities committed by the US during the war, yet does this to imply that these represent no more than the overstepping of the normal limits of war, one co-opts the grief of the defeated and robs them of their voice. In this case, what the victorious side executed under the form of war was not just war for the losing side; it was genocidal, as Fr. Schumacher's descriptions so clearly indicate.

The Convention for the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, established by the United Nations in 1948, would define genocide as

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in
whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: a. killing members of the group; b. causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c. deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;...

But the story from that losing side will never be heard when the only sources that have preserved the memory of its grief have been dismissed by the side of the victor—the side that desires to dictate what is and is not the stuff of history.

One expects that this same kind of co-option and dismissal would have happened if Adolf Eichmann or the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 had won their war. The point of this comparison being, of course, that when the side that systematically and forcefully seeks to undo the identity of an existing people or nation—destroying in whole or in part those whom it perceives as affirming, even in an indirect way, that identity—is the victor, then there is no reason for the banality of evil to end when the war ends. The dissolution of the losing side continues—albeit in less dramatic fashion—and the means of conveyance for this dissolution still entirely passes for normal.

Indeed, there is still need to have an ear for forgotten voices.