

Reservations for Cultural Minorities? A Case in Point

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The following letter by the former Bishop of Surigao, Msgr. Charles van den Ouwelant, MSC, seemed to be particularly apposite to the topic of this issue. With the permission of the writer, we decided to bring it to the notice of our readers. Ed.

Regional House, PME Fathers
Davao City, Philippines
June 6, 1977

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Dear Father Rahmann,

I received the copy of PQCS which you were so kind to send me. I know from the past that you have a long memory for friends and acquaintances and from recent reports I hear that you are helping left and right, even on a grand scale.

Reading the article on the Mamanuas of Cantugas reminded me of your work many years ago, probably as far back as the middle and late fifties, when you used to visit Surigao, especially the settlements of the Mamanuas around the Lake of Mainit. Your close associate, Mr. Maceda, also used to come to the place.

One of your undertakings, even at that early date, was to obtain a reservation for the Mamanuas. You were particularly concerned with the Mamanuas of Jalibong at the farther side of Kitcharao. I remember the names of influential people to whom you had appealed to help you. However, we may recall with pain how all your endeavors came to naught, and how in the succeeding years the encroachments upon their ancestral settlements continued unabated. What, and who was it that blocked your efforts?

In the late 1960's the plight of the Mamanua settlement of Mayag, Cantugas, was brought to my attention: Continuous harassment by the Christians. (You should have heard the Mamanuas pronounce the word "Christian"!) Former governors of the Mamanuas mentioned to us that in 1935 President Quezon had made a Presidential Proclamation in favor of the settlement. A research group in Manila tried to trace this for us, with negative results. We personally did some checking in the Malacañang Library to find out whether such a proclamation was still extant. There were various Proclamations for Surigao and Agusan, but there was no mention of Mayag, Cantugas.

We had no other recourse left but to start proceedings all over again. How many times over the years did we approach the Bureau of Forestry! We went there in the company of the then Commissioner of Small Settlers, Raul Beloso. In Surigao we worked with two successive Provincial Commanders who were the representatives of the Commission of Small Settlers. Together with them we visited the Mayag grounds, and a few times the Mamanuas came in group to make an appeal in the PC Barracks in Surigao. All of this effort stretched over several years, and when I finally left Surigao there was still no reservation for the Mamanuas. I remember I made a last minute effort in the Bureau of Forestry, shortly before my actual resignation. I had to go home again empty-handed, because our papers "were locked inside a drawer, and the only person who had access to that drawer happened to be out. . ."

All of this becomes more acrid when we consider that the "reservation" applied for was only 2 hectares (repeat, 2 hectares). That was all that was left of the land all around, and if it were not for the fact that their houses were built on it, they might even have lost what little was left to them.

Just think of this: these were the original inhabitants of Mindanao, who saw their hunting grounds being carved up until only 2 hectares were left for the remaining 80 families or so. They were denied any legal title of ownership in spite of four, five years of persistent effort.

Father Rahmann, you may wonder why I made this long digression when all I wanted to do was thank you for the *Quarterly*. But recalling your long enduring concern for these poor people moves me to share with you my perennial questioning of the "how" and "why" of things.

Let us hope for better years ahead for the natives. It is my consolation that my successor,

Bishop Miguel Cinches, has also shown concern for the welfare of the Mamanuas.

Sincerely,

(Signed)

CHARLES VAN DEN OUWELANT, MSC
Former Bishop of Surigao
Parish Priest Tibungco, Davao City

Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. (1916-1977)†

Joseph Baumgartner, S.V.D.

It must have been with a feeling almost of shock and a sense of great loss that the news of the untimely death of Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J., on March 20, 1977, was received by his numerous friends and admirers, especially among the fraternity of Philippine historians. Those of us who were familiar with his writings or had the privilege of making his personal acquaintance had long recognized him as one of the brightest stars in the as yet not overcrowded firmament of Philippine historiography. To this writer it has always been a matter of regret that other demands on Fr. de la Costa's time and energy (his appointments to Provincial Superior, 1964/1970, and then to General Assistant and Consultant to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, 1971/75), did not allow him the necessary leisure to continue his historical work, especially the long-awaited second volume of his *magnum opus*, "The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768", which, for the period covered, has been hailed as the best general history of the Philippines.

Fr. de la Costa has always appeared to me as the very model of a historian: impeccable in scholarship, balanced and sober in judgment, urbane and facile in presenting his findings. As a true son of his country, he tried to make historical research serve the needs of Philippine society as it tries to integrate its past and shape its future. He was aware, as few before him, of the rich cultural heritage of the Philippines, including its colonial heritage. Unlike some of our more extreme revisionists, who seem unable to see anything really good or worthwhile in the colonial past, he had that broad view of the true historian who is able to see events in a wider perspective. On balance he saw more good than ill coming out of the Spanish conquest of the Philippines. He would thus have agreed with what Rudolf Rahmann says in this issue on the same matter (p. 110).

Perhaps the following, somewhat lengthy, quote from an essay of de la Costa, which he wrote in 1959 (de la Costa: 1965), may serve better than many words to illustrate his thinking