

# The Philippines in Travail

By Roberto C. Canton

THE FILIPINO PEOPLE today are living in great peril. They are living in a country which is being festered with widespread injustice, criminality, graft and corruption, maldistribution of wealth and other insurmountable problems.

Our country is indeed in the crucial stage of its history as an independent nation. The multifarious problems plaguing this nation do not only corrode our national survival but also pose a serious threat to the very foundations of our democratic way of life.

Paradoxically, many people in this so called bastion of democracy in Asia are losing faith and confidence in the government as well as in the democratic processes. The masses, needless to say, are disenchanted with the government. This disenchantment is traceable to the failure of the government to alleviate the people's plight and to liberate the masses from the shackles of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, many citizens are very skeptical about the genuine existence of justice and democracy in this country.

From every length and breadth of the land, the people's cry for justice is unmistakably clear. Hundreds of people undertake the parliamement of the streets and people's congresses, condemning the existence of the so-called double standard of justice in our country and clamoring for a true and genuine democracy. They harange the gonnstabularies, the profligate landlords, the power-thirsty politicians, and the corrupt government officials whom they accuse of committing crimes and injustice to the have-nots and the defenseless citizenry. Moreover, they condemn the recent atrocities committed against the innocent and impoverished people in Bantay, Ilocos Sur and the underprivileged cultural minorities in South Cotabato and in other provinces. The injustices committed against those defenseless and powerless people, according to many citizens, sounded the death knell of democracy in this country.

Needless to say, the people are not only suffering from widespread injustice but also from the breakdown of peace and order in this country. The mounting rise of criminality and the deterioration of peace and order engendered by this country's rotten political system have great repercussions in our sense of values. Senator Lorenzo Tañada, in his speech delivered before the second national convention of the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism, says, "Under the present political system, we had seen incompetence enconced in office, dishonesty rewarded, the unscrupulous promoted; graft goes unpunished, wealth, no matter how acquired is exalted; authority, even if unjustly exercised adulated." "As a consequence," the nationalist senator added, "the administrative machinery moves sluggishly, economic development bogs down and poverty spreads and intensifies, justice grinds slowly, criminality rises and peace and order worsens."

In almost all parts of the country, killing, landgrabbing, armed robberies and all sorts of hooliganism are prevalent nowadays. In Central Luzon, an atmosphere of terror and violence prevails today, Filipinos are pitted against Filipinos, brothers against brother, the Huks against the BSDU's and other para-military units. The Huks are waging a vicious war against the duly constituted authorities and the defenseless citizens who

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## CHRISTIANITY AND . . . .

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one's life property, and liberty, to exercise one's rights from the unjust encroachments of another and with violence if necessary. One is even allowed to kill in self defense and just war. May the exploited, therefore, not use force to counteract the exploitation of their rich few?

Secondly, violence can be justified by the principles of government. Government authorities derive authority from the people. Such authority is given to government officials as a trust and charge that they should rule according to the aspirations of the people for a common good. If those in power abuse their authority and power and use it for personal aggrandizement, oppression, exploitation and gradually "kill the poor", may not the people take back from them their authority (honest election) and with violence if necessary?

### The Christian Attitude

Man by sin revolted against God but he did not answer in kind, but through His son who by His suffering and death conquered sin and nullified man's revolt. For hatred, God answered love through redemption.

Christ's example and sayings must be a Christian attitude. It was precisely his suffering for truth, freedom and justice and his dying for them, and not the use of brute force, that he saved us and was glorified. "Love your enemies", "Turn the other cheek", etc. are some of the many sayings of Christ that reveal a moral force.

The early christians finally conquered and Christianized the Roman Empire not by rising up against it in violent revolt, but by the power of truth, justice, and love, which just gained them in their suffering and persecution.

It is by the cross that the christian overcomes the world, It is by the power of truth, justice, freedom and love that he conquers it. These forces are more real, more powerful, and more noble than mere physical force of violence, and it is through these powers that we should work for the establishment of the Kingdom. The best way to eliminate an enemy is to make of him a friend. Not to kill him.

### Theology of Power

Power as a physical force, like suffering and death is a manifestation, and consequence of sin, of man's fall from grace. It is something which didn't exist in the paradoxical order of things, and which should not exist in the fully established and transformed kingdom of God.

Power, in itself, is not a sin, but like any creation of God, is a gift from God which has to be used responsibly. But since it stems from sin, it leads very easily to sin, unless used with faith and love.

Power is essential to man's existence. It is the ground for the exercise of human freedom, because all men share only one sphere of existence and freedom common to all. This is the very exercise of the true act. The absolute renunciation of force, therefore, is un-Christian and immoral because it would mean removing the ground for the exercise of freedom.

Power is a consequence of and manifestation of sin and, therefore, it too can easily be abused. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The wielder of power must check and safeguard himself against this danger.

The exercise of power on another has an eternal effect and bearing on that other's eternal destiny. There should be valid reasons for exercising power on another, and it must redound to that other's good here and for eternity.

"Power exists either as the embodiment of sin, egoism, and rebellion against God . . . or it exists as the effort of faith which knows that power is unreliable and unrewarding but accepts it obediently as a task from God, as long as he wills." (Theology of Power by Karl Kahner)

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experience in dealing with the establishment is dotted with frustrations due to the insincerities of their elders. This is the underlying cause why they refuse to seek mature advice in the belief that none of the elders is with them. This suspicion, born of actual experience, should not shatter man's confidence in man and should not blind the youth to the fact that the rank and file among the adults are wanting in men who could provide the proper element to temper their mettle into a metal of the highest quality. The right combination can produce steel of the greatest strength.

#### THE IDEA POWER

The sharpest tool can be forged out of this combination. There are well-meaning men; youth must trust them and adopt their ideas. There are reliably responsible young people endowed with the ability to think clearly. The adults should exploit their bright ideas. The convergence of ideas from both sources when synthesized will produce a most potent force — the idea power — incisive, penetrating, piercing, irresistible.

Idea power is a mastermind. It is the fusion of ideas emanating from the deep and profound thinking of several minds. Idea power is potent and long-lasting only if the element of youthful vigor is in it. Likewise in a dynamic society where the constant quest for a change for the better is a basic concern, maximum actualization of the desirable change is only possible through idea power in which youth again must be involved.

In the last analysis, youth on the rampage — properly utilized — is a social phenomenon which is an imperative to change!

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refused to rally behind their cause.

Ironically, the dissident movement in Central Luzon is gaining momentum because the government overlooks the real causes of the Huk uprisings which are poverty, social injustice, and maldistribution of lands. Many citizens are reportedly resorting to the so-called kangaroo courts of the Huks because they have completely lost their faith and confidence in the judicial processes. Ortega Y. Gaset, in his classic "Revolt of the Masses," observed, "Man had recourse to violence. Sometimes this recourse was a mere crime but at other times, violence was the means resorted to by him who had previously exhausted all other means in defense of the rights of justice which he thought he possessed."

Sad to say, the rule of the gun rather than the rule of law reigns supreme, nowadays. Just recently, Mayor Leopoldo Rabanes of San Marcelino, Zambales together with thirteen other persons were massacred in cold blood in the presence of horrified spectators. A few months ago, Rep. Jose Laurel and Gov. Lumaig of Ifugao narrowly escaped death when they were ambushed by a host of criminals. In the heart of the city of Manila a few weeks ago, Rep. Salipada Pendatun's life was nearly snuffed off by the assassins' bullets. If the government officials nowadays, who are enjoying the protection of bodyguards, are no longer safe from the barrel of the gun, how much more the ordinary citizens?

Unfortunately, innumerable perpetrators of those heinous crimes are roaming around scot-free, victimizing numerous innocent citizens. This could be attributed to the inefficiency and negligence of duty of the

authorities and the lack of moral courage of the witnesses who refused to go out in the open and testify in court for fear of retaliations and reprisals. Many witnesses prefer to be living cowards than dead heroes. As a consequence, many aggrieved citizens are now taking the law into their own hands.

The "Pearl of the Orient Seas" is indeed in travail. As Pres. Marcos puts it, "the country today is sitting on top of a social volcano that could erupt anytime with such a devastating force as to blow our institutions to smithereens."

However, there is still much hope that the Filipino people can prevent this dreaded volcano from erupting. It is the consensus that this can only be achieved by undergoing a catharsis of our mind and character and by eradicating greed and hatred from our hearts. Unless the people will change their hearts and see the best solutions to our problems, there will be no guarantee that we will not be drawn into the valley of destruction.

#### THE OTHER REVOLUTION . . .

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It is imperative that such a change in attitude must be instituted if we are to accomplish anything in the line of alleviating the undesirable effects of these social problems. Unless this attitude of gross permissiveness to the corruption and injustice existing around is eradicated, we will not get anywhere in our work for social reforms. What is the use of changing and improving a system when the people for whom it is changed do not themselves fight for honesty, integrity, and justice in its processes?

Who fills in the need of a revolutionizing factor in our people's way of thinking other than the young Filipinos themselves? Who can understand Filipinos better than Filipinos? There is a need for a redirection of attitudes, of mentality, and the youth with their dedication and zest can do a lot along these lines. This is the essential change that they must effect before they can move on to work for other changes.

The attitude of awe and fear for those who have the money and the power must be eradicated. The justification of a contemptible act like dishonesty in government service for the reason that the majority does it, has to be made null. The resigned attitude towards a double-standard kind of justice, one that caters to the rich and bites the poor, must be checked.

It is high time that our people realize that a preponderance of individuals who advocate a wrong thing does not make it right and does not justify its practice; that money and power do not bestow on some individuals the privilege to trample on the rights of others; and, that tolerance and silent protest to these actions make us active participants in them.

The revolution we need is a revolution of attitude in ourselves. This is the other revolution that the youth have to work for. This is the revolution which they must effect for the success of the reforms they work for. This is the more fundamental revolution, hard to achieve perhaps, but this can be done, if we work for it with determination and perseverance.

*For, such as we are, such are the times.*