

VIEWS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE PHILIPPINE SCENE

The Message Of Jorge Bocobo

Only recently the Honorable Jorge Bocobo died at the approach of his 80th birthday. The Filipinos thereby lost one of their most valued leaders in various fields of public service. He devoted the greater part of his life to education in its broadest concept, for in his active life he served not only as a classroom teacher but also as an academic administrator, and not only as a professional school worker but also as a social reformer.

He was an enthusiastic participant in religious movements and a fearless defender of national causes on the higher levels of governmental and political affairs. [The authorized author of the national prayer which the Philippines needed in the dark days of her struggle for identity and freedom, Bocobo provided the spiritual expression of the aspirations of our people. The vigor and sincerity of his convictions in matters that he considered important were almost fanatical in their fervor. This was particularly so in questions which involved deep moral issues.]

Bocobo was one of the outstanding jurists the Philippines has produced. His chosen field of specialization was civil law. In this legal discipline, he was not a mere compiler of judicial decisions or a mechanical annotator of codes and statutes. He was a real legal scientist, a true jurist, expressing his well-studied ideas on the meaning of particular aspects of law and jurisprudence, explaining his critical views on specific judicial decisions, and declar-

ing his incisive opinions on the evils or advantages of legislative measures.

But for the moment this discussion will be confined to his educational and cultural work. In this field, he served as a classroom law teacher, College of Law dean, U.P. President, and head of our Department of Education.

Less than a year after my admission as a student in the College of Law, Professor Bocobo was appointed dean of the College. It was then that he started to make known to the law students his ideas on character, his nationalistic convictions, and his dedication to the development of moral values. Every week he posted a one-page essay on the bulletin board of the College entitled *Monday Mentor*. This was a concise talk on what is expected of the student in the classroom, in college activities, and in the community.

The general ideas running through that series of essays centered on the student's problems in and outside the school. They were an appeal to idealism, a stimulus to higher aspirations. They were intended as a guide for the student in serious academic efforts. Lucidly written, they attracted students to the bulletin board in groups eager to read the warm message of our new dean.

Among the varied topics discussed, there was an insistent and clear call for devotion to the Mother Land. It was an urge for positive nationalism. This was an overpowering feeling amounting to a profound passion — almost an obsession — of our Dean. But his approach on the subject was uniquely sincere. It was not that of a politician or a publicity seeker or a notorious opportunist who uses nationalism as a defensive mechanism against a background of anti-nationalist behavior. His approach was that of an intellectual moralist. For he treated the pro-

motion and defense of our nation as a moral issue worthy of the noblest and most unselfish thought and conduct of every true Filipino and of every man who claims himself as a Filipino. For that stand he was greatly admired by some, and attacked, even ridiculed, by others including those who paraded themselves as intellectuals, economists, and high politicians. It was that strong moral concern he had for his country which made his detractors call him the *Gloomy Dean*. But he paid absolutely no attention to their taunts. For one thing was sure: no one dared accuse him of immorality, speculation, or suspicion of bribery and corruption. At one time when even President Quezon, who was his great friend, expressed disapproval of some stern attitude he had assumed he confided to me his feelings by saying that the President would in time realize that he had been only moved by what he, as Professor, had considered his duty.

Incidentally, his *Monday Mentor* was always written in a clear, refined, and facile style. The simplicity of his phrases and sentences made his essays pleasantly readable. His choice of words made his thoughts appealing. Forty years before the Filipino reading public had come to hear or read the lovely cadences of the famous speeches of Adlai Stevenson, Dean Bocobo's pen had already been producing bewitching prose to the admiration of those who had the chance of reading his literary pieces. He did not need to plagiarize the smooth style and the incisive ideas of Adlai which have been so irresistibly enchanting as a temptress to one or more Filipino four-flushers.

The Filipinism of Dean Bocobo was concerned with moral and cultural values, not with superficialities. He was not interested in the spectacular for the mere purpose of vain publicity. His interest

as academic head was in the development of the culture, the thinking, and the ideals of the Filipino youth. While in some instances his methods were not accepted by others, his objectives were praiseworthy, scholarly correct, and above board.

We remember his work in encouraging researches and studies in Filipino folk music and dancing without which the now famed Bayanihan Dance troupe would not have perhaps been born. Few seem to recall that the first important faculty committee he organized as University President was the Committee on Culture, which was to take charge of a monthly gathering of professors, students, and visitors to hear a talk by a group leader on an educational or cultural subject. Then to encourage students to acquire excellent behavior and to improve social manners, President Bacobo organized a Courtesy Committee and a publication known as Courtesy Appeals. This he adopted in the Department of Education after he had left the U.P. presidency to serve as Secretary of that Department of the national government.

The message of Bocobo's life was one of unpretentious idealism and courageous adherence to truth, freedom, and justice. He was not without blemish in his record as a toiler in the service of his people, for he was far from being a perfect human being. But the imperfections in his career were not those of a self-seeking, publicity-hankering, and insincere individual striving to put himself on a pinnacle of false pretenses. They were honest mistakes of a selfless teacher and an authentic scholar whose moral standards and noble deeds will long remain in our memory. — *V. G. Sinco.*

The Image Preoccupation

It has become fashionable these days to talk about one's image and to consider it with very great concern. This is not only the case with individuals but also with institutions, political, social, educational, and business. Each is interested in presenting a good image before other people; and each is worried about having a poor image to present to the public.

What after all is an image? It is no more and no less than an appearance. Of course, it is quite proper to have a good appearance. One should not appear dirty or unshaven before others. An applicant for a job should be neatly dressed. A lady could be seriously embarrassed today when she goes out to a party dressed in the fashion of twenty years ago. She could be misunderstood by observers. She could be taken for a crank or a candidate for a psychopathic hospital.

The best example of image-worshipping people is the politician. He shines as an example because he is concerned about the impression he makes in almost everything he does outside of the privacy of his home. As a matter of fact, he does not even care about having any kind of privacy in his own home. To win the votes of the poor, he claims that he was born poor and had to suffer the miseries of poverty. He appears before them in cheap clothing. He eats with them using his bare fingers. He kisses the hands of older people in public in order to appear extremely respectful to age. He tries to be spectacularly courteous to every man and woman, young and old, who are seen around him. He uses all kinds

of publicity stunts the fertility of his imagination could devise, all for the sake of creating an attractive image of himself.

Of course, the tricks of the politician are also practiced by persons in other callings or occupations. These are not only to be found among people in business and industry who are engrossed in money-making activities. They secure the expert assistance of so-called public relations executives to advertise their services or their products as something indispensable for building up their public image. A face powder or cream that restores youthful beauty to wilted cheeks is dangled before newspaper readers and radio listeners as a must for improving one's social image.

In this country of ours where opportunists may be found in different corners of society, the preoccupation for an attractive image is nation-wide. For the opportunist must always be ready to appear in the guise of an honest individual who is always moved by vapid reasons for jumping from one camp to another, from one party to another. He may look impeccable to those who do not know him well enough and who judge him only by his fine words and by the publicity he gets for himself from friendly newspapers. But he may in reality be just a smart hypocrite, a clever charlatan, who has succeeded in creating an admirable image of himself. If he heads a gambling club, it does not matter much. But if he is the pastor of a church or the president of a university, or the secretary of education or the judge of a court, no words could be strong enough to expose and condemn his pretensions, no matter how subtle and refined they may be for he uses them purposely to give him the appearance of greatness. A plagiarist is sometimes mistaken for a competent writer; and by employing ghosts, he man-

ages to protect his inferior ability with the better product of his hirelings.

In Saturday Review of July 3, 1965, Archibald MacLeish criticizing what he considers the present American policy of indifference to outside opinion on action in Vietnam, wrote:

"We consider, not what we have to do, but what the world thinks of what we have to do. And the result is preoccupation with the opinion of others, the kind of preoccupation which the advertising industry has exploited with such humiliating consequences.

"There is truth in all this, of course, too much truth for comfort. The exploitation of a decent human concern for others to bully men and women into buying mouthwash is one of the least lovely things in American life. And the corruption of language which accompanies it is another. Take, for example, the word *image*, which was once used a word of art employed with rigorous precision by disciplined poets who knew exactly what they meant by it. It has now become a trade term of the advertising agencies used in the muzzy, fuzzy, girlish sort of way to mean what people think of you — or more precisely what they will think if you don't use a particular deodorant or a certain soap or the brand of China policy advocated by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Nobody thinks of a man anymore — only of the *image* of a man. Nobody thinks of a policy — only of the *image* of a policy. Sooner or later no one will think of the Republic either — only of the *image* of the Republic — how the United States would look in a full-page ad." — V. G. S.

The Parvenu Society

Economic development and social uplift, full employment, and high wages do not necessarily indicate national strength. An affluent society, to use a term popularized by Professor Galbraith, may be facing moral bankruptcy. Wealth in abundance may create an arid sense of decency. The pursuit of prosperity often utilizes ruthless methods and follows devious routes. It is not unusual to find individuals and communities enjoying a life of ease and pleasure in an atmosphere of moral filth. The evolution of man and society can only be stunted and repressed when the higher ideals of a reflective life are not actively promoted.

The highest goal of a socio-economic program of development is not attainable when the chief incentives it holds out to the people are no more than abundance of rice and meat, a car for every family, a surplus of foreign exchange reserves, an ever-mounting gross national product, and an escalating per capita income. Not that these are undesirable matters but alone they cannot fully meet man's exalted aspirations for a life of dignity and humar service. They are necessary for individual and community existence and comfort; but they are not the indispensable ingredients of a noble life and spiritual freedom.

To strive for a high standard of living is a legitimate and worthy ambition. But we need to visualize what we are after in its true perspective. We should understand the meaning of a high standard of living. It is not attained by simply having an income high enough to enable one to own a flashy car and a luxurious home, to dress elegantly according to the latest style, to have servants at our beck

and call, to take trips abroad, to give sumptuous banquets.

Not a few in our country today have succeeded in accumulating enough money to do all these and more. Most of them have the spirit of the parvenu. Their sense of values is vulgar and distorted. The fact that they are rich has made them feel and act as if wealth gives them blank permission to ignore the law and the rules of good behavior. They feel they could buy their way to high public offices. Quite a number of them have actually done so; and the country has been the worse for it. Rampant delinquency, both juvenile and adult, has been the consequence. The evils of society have proliferated. Explosion in vice has followed explosion in population; and so a state of readiness for social disintegration looms perceptively over the Philippine horizon. The best elements of the nation now face this challenge. The preservation of human values is at stake. — *V. G. Sinco.*

ACCIDENT

An employer's assistant — bruised, scratched and battered — arrived at the office one hour late. "I fell out of a window," he explained. His employer asked: "So did that take an hour?" — *Harry Hershfield.*