

The Filipino Struggle For Intellectual Freedom

By *Leopoldo Yabes*

This article by Prof. Leopoldo Yabes, Asst. Head, English Dept., U.P., is presented with pride. Though not a Brother, Prof. Yabes is deeply interested in the preservation of freedom for all, the same interest that we Masons have.

The Filipino struggle for freedom of the intellect has been long and arduous. It has been attended with setbacks and defeats and with some periodic successes. As of today the struggle enters a critical stage and the fight ahead appears to be more arduous than ever because of the cunning and insidiousness of the enemies of freedom. If the struggle is not waged with the dedication and wisdom that it needs, we may yet lose again, maybe for a long period of time, our freedom to think and act for our own selves.

As this piece is intended for people adequately informed on their own history, it should not be necessary to go back to the distant past except to state that the Muslim and Medieval Christian religious systems, which have ruled large portions of the country for about half a millennium, were not noted for any libertarian tradition or intentions. So it was necessary for those who believed in freedom of the mind to work for that freedom under conditions of indifference and even hostility. During the Spanish occupation, ecclesiastical or military censorship was ever on the alert to clamp down on thinking believed to be subversive of the regime.

Interestingly enough, among the first to protest against the enslavement of the intellect were some members of the clergy, notably Pedro Pelaez and Jose Burgos. Of course these men fought for emancipation of the mind not as clergymen but as Filipinos. It was as much for this freedom of the intellect as for the assertion of Filipino nationality that Gregorio Aglipay and Isabelo de los Reyes founded the Philippine Independent church at the turn of the century.

Foremost among the Filipinos who led the intellectual fight against enslavement of the mind during the pre-revolutionary period were Jose Rizal, M. H. del Pilar, and Graciano Lopez-Jaena. It is interesting to note that these were all Masons. Masonry then, it may be said, led in the fight for the emancipation of the Filipino mind during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. After these men died, outstanding intellectuals like Apolinario Mabini, T. H. Pardo de Tavera, Antonio Luna, Cecilio Apostol, Fernando Guerrero, Tomas G. del Rosario, and Felipe Calderon took over and led the fight. Of course, this fight would not have met much success if the Revolution led by Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo—more men of action than of the intellect—had not come and made the atmosphere more conducive to free and independent thinking.

The provision in the Malolos Constitution which makes Church and State separate and which recognizes the free-

dom and equality of religious worship—basic tenets in the American concept of democracy—was very significant because it was adopted by a Congress whose membership was composed almost completely of Catholics. Although the approval was only by a majority of one vote, it was a bold new step, a complete turning back against tradition. The Philippine Bill of 1902, the Jones Law of 1916, the Hale-Hawes-Cutting Act of 1933, the Tydings-McDuffee Act of 1934, and the Constitution of 1935 only affirmed what had been decided in Malolos in 1899.

The principle of separation of Church and State is fundamental to freedom of the mind. The intellectual histories of states with official religions reveal that whatever great thinkers such states may have produced, were made possible because they fought against the crippling influence of the church. Throughout the Spanish regime here the Philippines was not able to produce any great thinker with the possible exception of Rizal, who was a Mason. The case of T. H. Pardo de Tavera may also be cited, but this man began producing his courageous articles only after Spanish rule had been thrown out. Other thinkers like Rafael Palma and Epifanio de los Santos, both born in the 1870's, began to mature only after the opening of the present century. And of course such men as Teodoro M. Kalaw, Vicente Sotto, Fernando Maramag, Ignacio Manlapaz, and Claro M. Recto could not have thrived except under a regime where Church and State are separate and where freedom of religious worship is recognized.

An enumeration of civil rights, first introduced in the Biacnabato and Malolos Constitutions, was expanded into

a Bill of Rights in the Autonomy Act of 1902 and in the Jones Law of 1916, was reiterated in the Independence Bills of 1933 and 1934, and was consecrated in the Philippine Constitution. Even the Constitution of the Japanese-sponsored Republic, promulgated under a totalitarian regime, recognized certain freedoms of the individual.

These civil liberties guaranteed to the individual citizen by the Constitution and laws of the land make possible the development of an atmosphere where the individual can cultivate his faculties to the utmost. They provide the opportunity for the full flowering of the human spirit. It is only in an atmosphere where the fundamental civil liberties are recognized and protected that one may find the fullest opportunity for self-development.

Of course it is to be expected that certain persons and institutions which have never believed in freedom will always try to render innocuous or suppress altogether such civil liberties. They use a variety of devices, stratagems, and tactics to achieve their aims. When they find the going rough, they may abandon their project temporarily to resume it again when the times are more auspicious. That's what they actually did during the American regime. No matter how much they disliked the American concept of civil liberties, they found it futile to fight that concept frontally. Besides, this concept seemed to be acceptable to the people, as they observed it in actual practice. With the exception of the abuses the American military perpetrated on portions of the civilian population during the Filipino-American war at the turn of the century and on the dissidents during the early years of the American civil rule, it can be said that on the whole

the American rule respected and protected the civil rights of the people. Even the Republican Party, which was opposed to Philippine independence at an early date, could not publicly deny to the Filipinos the very freedoms the Americans were enjoying. In fact it should be stated that while they doubted our capacity for political independence, they affirmed our right to the civil liberties. It should be said therefore that were it not for the American rule, our struggle for the preservation of our civil liberties could have been lost earlier. As it was, the enemies of these freedoms, realizing the futility of any frontal attack on these freedoms then, chose to lie low to wait for some more opportune time.

The time came during the Constitutional Convention and after the establishment of the Commonwealth. The last overt attempt to nullify the principle of separation of Church and State occurred with the presentation, by a prominent member of the Convention, of a proposal to the Chairman of the Committee on Bill of Rights, to the effect "that in all public schools there shall be prescribed a course in moral ethics or the religion of the parents of the school children, at the option of the parents," for inclusion in the Bill of Rights. The Committee, however, did not include this in its draft on the Bill of Rights. Not to be daunted, the enemies of the separation of Church and State, when the draft of the Constitution was presented for discussion on the floor of the Convention containing the present clause on religious instruction, presented an amendment, as follows: "En todos las clases publicas se incluira entre las asignaturas la moral o instruccion religiosa a opcion de los padres o encargados de los discipulos."

When reminded by other delegates that there was already a law permitting religious instruction in public schools under certain conditions, the delegate who presented the amendment said, "That is precisely what I am opposing, the present provisions of the law."¹ The amendment failed of passage.

But this defeat did not dishearten the opponents of freedom of thought. With the support of the ecclesiastical authorities of the majority sect, a bill was passed by the First National Assembly in 1938, "to carry out more effectively the provisions contained in Section 928 of Act numbered 2711, known as the Administrative Code, and in Section 5, Article XIII, of the Constitution, regarding optional religious instruction." When President Quezon vetoed the bill as unconstitutional and contrary to the principle of separation of Church and State, the authorities of the ecclesiastical province of Cebu issued a pastoral letter urging the reenactment of the vetoed bill. This enraged Quezon, who issued a statement in which he said in part:²

I am amazed at the boldness of the metropolitan archbishop and suffragan bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Cebu in taking up at an episcopal conference a matter concerning the constitutional duties and prerogatives of the officials and branches of the Government of the Commonwealth.

I had so far ignored charges made to the effect that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the Philippines had instigated and was behind the movement for the enactment of the bill regarding religious instruc-

¹ Messages of the President, Vol. IV, Part 2 (Manila, Bureau of Printing, 1939), pp. 665-666.
² *Ibid.*

tion in the Philippines. But the pastoral letter signed by the metropolitan archbishop and suffragan bishops of that ecclesiastical province is an incontrovertible evidence that we did face at the last session of the Assembly, and we do face now, one of the most menacing evils that can confront the government and people of the Philippines, namely, the interference of the church in the affairs of the state. It seems that the archbishop and the bishops who have written this pastoral letter are blind to the lessons of history, including our own during the Spanish regime. Being a Catholic myself, I am less interested in preserving the independence of the church from the state than I am in preserving the independence of the government from the church.

It should not be necessary to remind the ecclesiastical authorities in the Philippines that the separation of the church and state in this country is a reality and not a mere theory, and that as far as our people are concerned, it is forever settled that this separation shall be maintained as one of the cardinal tenets of our Government. The ecclesiastical authorities should realize, therefore, that any attempt on their part to interfere with matters that are within the province of the Government will not be tolerated."

Quezon challenged the opponents of separation of Church and State to bring the question to the people as an election issue, but they did not accept the challenge. They remained silent, biding their time.

Then the war and enemy occupation came. Still they remained silent. It seems they were cowed by a stronger

evil force. When the enemy regime decreed the liberalization of divorce, no vocal opposition came from their direction. But, strangely enough, when the war ended and the regime of freedom was restored once more, these people were again busy sabotaging the very freedoms for which we had fought the war. The old demand for a more effective implementation of the Constitutional provision regarding optional religious instruction in the public schools was again revived. Quezon, their powerful enemy, was dead. The use of Roman Ozaeta's English translation of Palma's biography of Rizal in the public schools was violently opposed and some education officials were accused as Masons. The publication, by the national government, of T. A. Agoncillo's *Revolt of the Masses*, prize-winning entry in a Republic-sponsored contest on the life of Andres Bonifacio, was delayed many times and finally given up because of protests from certain sectarian agencies.

Another fight between the liberal and the reactionary forces was over the Rizal bill. The authors of the bill wanted to imbue our people, especially our youth, with our libertarian tradition, of which Rizal was one of the foremost exponents. The enemies of that tradition fought the bill with all their resources. Happily the Filipino people knew who their real enemy was, and the bill was enacted into law.

In the University of the Philippines a sectarian agency proposed the establishment of a department of religion, and the president of the University, taking the cue, formalized the proposal in a speech on what he called his philosophy of education, made in December 1954 in connection, paradoxically enough, with the bicentennial celebra-

tion of Columbia University the theme of which was, "Man's right to knowledge and the free use thereof." In that speech and in some other speeches and messages, instead of coming out in defense of academic freedom, he tried to discredit it. When the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts decided to publish Agoncillo's *Revolt of the Masses* after the failure of the national government to publish it, sectarian opposition was again voiced over the radio and in the press. Complaints were made with the President of the University and with the President of the Republic. Happily so far the complaints have not been entertained. For if outside agencies can succeed in interfering with the academic freedom of the University, then the University is completely lost as a center of learning and becomes a mere propaganda agency for certain vested interests.

At regards the Rizal bill, the University community seems to have been a little more enlightened than other communities. The opposition here was not as strong as it was elsewhere and it was more circumspect. Even some of those who were expected to oppose it violently, remained outwardly non-committal.³ Those who opposed the bill, curiously enough, made use of the right of freedom of conscience as their main argument against the bill, a right, by the way, which they don't believe in.

The attack on intellectual freedom is not always direct. Sometimes it assumes subtle and therefore more insidious forms. Sometimes an influential

man with liberal ideas but not well circumstanced financially, is brought out by the offer of a lucrative job. Maybe without knowing it, he soon finds it harder and harder to be assertive on the very freedoms that are the basis of a democratic society, and in the end he will not find it hard to walk the path marked out for him by his benefactor. So one more independent mind is silenced. Sometimes the attack is made as an offer of preferences or arrangements advantageous socially, politically, or economically. The unwary are quite likely to fall for such attractive arrangements. As a matter of fact a considerable number of such people have flourished under such arrangements, but have ceased being respected for their courageous and independent thinking. Some are now with the *non-vaux riches*, some are on the higher echelons of government, some are in industrial and business management, and some are in the highly profitable business called the higher learning. In such fields it is more safe and advantageous to hold no views or hold only views that are harmless. Such people therefore constitute so many more souls lost to the cause of intellectual freedom.

As we said in the beginning, our struggle for intellectual freedom, despite some successes in the past, has not been won. As it is now, it is still an uphill fight. The power and endurance of the enemies of freedom, on the right as well as on the left, are not to be underestimated. Those on the right are perhaps as dangerous as those on the left, if not more so, because they are more socially and intellectually influential and so can be more cunning and insidious. So we should guard against both.

This is no time to despair, though,

³ Vidal A. Tan, *Our Philosophy of Education* (Quezon City, 1954), p. 5.

⁴ The faculty of the College of Liberal Arts, in a meeting held before the passage by the Congress of the Rizal bill, passed a resolution endorsing the bill. Only a few opposed the resolution.

in spite of the not very bright outlook. We can depend on the innate intelligence and sound judgment of the Filipino people. Some of them may now and then be deceived by people who don't believe in freedom. But in due time they will join with the libertarian tradition of intellectual leaders like Rizal, del Pilar, Lopez-Jaena, Mahini, Pardo de Tavera, Palma, Jose Abad Santos, T. M. Kalaw, and Recto; of religious leaders like Burgos, Aglipay, and de los Reyes; of statesmen like Quezon, Osmeña, and Juan Sumulong; of politico-military leaders like Bonifacio, Aguinaldo, Luna, Alejandro, and Vinzons; and of educationists like Francisco Benitez, B. M. Gonzalez, Camilo Osias, Vicente G. Sinco, Esteban Abada, and Florentino Cayco. That tradition is bound to prevail over the nihilist and obscurantist traditions. But we should do our utmost to make it prevail soon. That is our sacred duty to ourselves, to our posterity, to our country, and to the cause of democracy.



DISTRICT GRAND LODGE CONVENTIONS

The officers and brethren of the nine lodges composing the First Masonic District under the leadership of Very Wor. Bro. Mariano G. Almeda met in convention on Feb. 21, 1959 at Santiago, Isabela with Cagayan Valley Lodge No. 133 of that town as host lodge. A number of Grand Lodge officers led by the Grand Master motored to Santiago to be present at the convention and to give the main address.

A week after, the Grand Lodge officers flew to the south in Cagayan de Oro City to attend the convention of the Seventh Masonic District under Very Wor. Bro. Jose L. Araneta, on February 27 & 28, 1959.

MEDINA IS COMMISSIONER AND TECHNOLOGIST FOR PAEC

Wor. Bro. Florencio Medina, PM, Quezon City Lodge No. 122 and a full colonel in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, has been appointed a member and technologist of the Philippine Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC). Shortly after he took his oath of office, Wor. Bro. Medina made a hurried trip to Washington on orders of President Garcia to confer with Washington officials re final arrangements for the immediate construction of an atomic reactor plant in Diliman, Quezon City on the edge of the University of the Philippines campus.

While in Washington, Bro. Medina worked hard and far into the night with Washington authorities of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission on plans for the plant. It will be recalled that for sometime there was doubt as to the construction of the plant in the Philippines, it having been tentatively decided to be built in some other country in Asia.

It is now definitely known that the construction of the plant in Quezon City will commence early in June this year. Machineries for the plant are expected to arrive shortly.

Before his appointment to the PAEC, Bro. Medina was chief of the Research Division of the Armed Forces and part-time professor in the University of the Philippines and other universities in Manila. He is an honor graduate in Chemical Engineering of the State University and has travelled extensively in Europe and the United States for conferences, study and observation on atomic reactor plants and the production of atomic energy for peaceful uses.