

■ This paper covers the ideas of Vicente G. Sinco which he expressed in answer to some questions directed to him by professors in a radio interview broadcast in the University of the Philippines in the early part of this month of September.

## UNIVERSITIES AND OUR SOCIAL PROBLEMS

1. Philippine society is indeed plagued with social and moral ills. They may lead to a moral breakdown. But that catastrophe has not yet taken place as of now. However, in the present scene there is clearly perceptible a development towards what I would call a state of moral atrophy. This may be easily observed in the prominence our newspapers and magazines give to reports on crimes, immoralities, revolting scandals, and illegal acts daily taking place in different parts of the country. Reports of all sorts of fraudulent and violent practices happening in various social levels not only in connection with political elections but also in the regular government and business activities, in our civil service and professional examinations, and in our police services. Pro-

mises are made by candidates for public offices without any thought of fulfilling them. Public offices, which are supposed to be in the nature of public trust, are in effect bought and sold through bribery in various forms. Decisions of tribunals are ignored and often disregarded with impunity. A notorious example affecting the higher public positions in this respect was the way three senators continued holding their seats in spite of a tribunal's decision that they had no more right to remain there because they spent for their election campaign amounts in excess of the limits the law prescribes. Indifference to the proprieties and decencies of social order is shown by men and women in different spheres of our national life without any feeling of moral discomfort

much less any indication of remorse. A considerable number of Filipinos have acquired wealth and affluence through the indiscriminate exploitation of our forests and natural resources and through abuse or misuse of political positions which they employ for personal glory and material gain.

2. In my opinion, the role that universities should play towards the solution of social problems is to revitalize its traditional function as the principal organ in the development of higher education and brain power of men and women who are to plan and operate the institutions of society. Concretely expressed, universities should religiously set high standards of work, of scholarship, of performance in their educational and academic tasks assigned to students and instructors. Then with these standards for superior conduct and performance, universities should never tire in insisting that their constituencies, from their head to their most humble teacher and student, strive as much as possible to understand and appreciate these standards

and to observe them reasonably, faithfully, and consistently in actual work and life. The idea should be fixed permanently in the student's mind that being a student is an occupation, a job, the job of studying and learning.

3. The stated aims and goals in the curriculum offerings of a university do not have to be reoriented because real universities in modern countries have common aims and goals. These are primarily the improvement of the mental, moral, and emotional capacities that should transform the individual into a responsible and productive member of the community.

It has been stated time and again, with great pride and self-praise, that our universities have for their aim, among others, the development of leaders. But between this claim and the realities with which we should measure university products or alumni, it is quite doubtful if this claim could be validly supported in many instances. The universities in this country can not disclaim responsibility for the disgusting social, moral, and political decline of our

national life. We cannot offer convincing proofs that the Philippines today under our new generation of leaders produced by our universities is a much better country, socially, morally, and culturally, than what it was in the past when the country was under the influence of the generation of such leaders as Sergio Osmeña, Manuel Quezon, Juan Sumulong, Rafael Palma, Claro M. Recto, and other prominent men of yesteryear. Let us bear in mind that in the last 20 years the new generation of leaders, who are the more recent products of our universities, have come to hold the higher positions of the government and to direct the political and social courses the nation has been following. Many observers are of the opinion that they are primarily concerned about building an impressive public image of themselves but that their record leaves much to be desired. The depressed social conditions of the country today are the result of inadequate, selfish, and insincere leadership. Dependable and independent observers of the

performance of the present men and women in the higher political, economic, and social positions are convinced that the efforts this new generation of leaders have been exerting are almost wholly directed towards the acquisition of personal political power or economic influence. Their purpose in most cases is that of enriching themselves rather than of advancing the general welfare. The ideas and the lives of Jose Rizal and Marcelo del Pilar have ceased to serve as guiding influences in their conduct and their decisions.

It has to be admitted, however, that the physical aspects of some of our cities now present a more attractive outward appearance than what they were 30 or more years ago. But in general our intellectual, educational, moral, and spiritual modes of living and attitudes have gone down in quality. This is why we have this frustrating feeling that the country has been facing a social crisis and a moral breakdown. We have to face the fact that the new generation of Filipino leaders, generally those under 60 years

of age, have yet to show that they have the qualifications to run honestly and efficiently a modern and progressive democracy.

4. In my opinion there are two possible loopholes in our university education that need to be plugged up to make university education more directly pertinent and broadly significant to the nation's program and actual work for social improvement. One of these consists in a stronger emphasis on a well-planned general or liberal education which should be required of every person who enrolls in the university for any academic degree and for any professional course. The other is the adoption of firm standards of conduct and work and an insistence that they be used to measure performance.

The program of general education is an essential factor for a thorough understanding and appreciation of moral and intellectual standards. Without these we can hardly expect our nation to rise above the present threat of social decadence; and without these, we can hardly develop a more human attitude in our social or individual

relations. To carry out this program effectively at least two factors are needed: The first is a high degree of concentration on liberal studies such as what is done in superior types of universities, as Harvard, Chicago, and other strong centers of higher education in America where the administration or the operation of schools or courses for general education is made obligatory on their students and is placed under a separate organization, which at times bear the title of basic or university college.

The second is a systematic practice of demanding from students that every one of them do their work to the highest degree of which they are capable. This does not mean that a single and uniform standard of excellence be required of every student and in every subject of study. We should face the fact that students differ in intellectual abilities; some of them have much higher talents than others for certain studies and some have stronger interests in certain disciplines than others. The important thing is that every one should perform his work to the highest degree he is capable.

5. As to what specific subjects should be taken to help strengthen the moral and spiritual stamina of our students in order to enable them to arrest the decline of the social order of our country and the deterioration of our moral conditions, I want to say the following: Social problems involve difficult and complex questions. Obviously, to tackle them successfully group action is necessary; but the kind, the quality, and the strength of group action depend upon the quality of the individual. Hence, in the final analysis the individual is the determining factor. To a certain extent the environment influences the individual; but at the same time the individual has also the power to change the environment to an appreciable degree.

The problems of poverty, ignorance, crime, disease, and other social infirmities that plague our people are not necessarily insurmountable if properly approached and understood. They are at bottom problems of values — intellectual, moral, and esthetic values. A study of the natural sciences can help develop an appre-

ciation of these values to some extent. But in their plenitude and depth, values could be acquired, imbibed, and retained by the students in a fuller measure through the studies of humanities, which cover literature, philosophy, religion, and the arts.

Social problems are problems that confront man as a human being, not as a mere element of the natural environment. They are problems that disturb man as a conscious personality bound by obligations and feelings of relationship with his fellowmen. They could be best understood, faced, and solved with courage by men and women who are imbued with a deep comprehension of human values and their immeasurable worth. These qualities alone can stir a genuine sense of obligation in a person, that human feeling or impulse which the average Filipino unfortunately has yet to develop deeply, to obey implicitly, and to keep as a precious and permanent gift for the good of the individual and the nation. With it the products of universities could be expected to run down, expose, and condemn the liar, the

turncoat, the robber, the fraud, the smuggler, the hypocrite, the sciolist, and all the other vicious elements that have infested our poor country. This — the develop-

ment of a strong sense of personal and social responsibility — is an indispensable aim of a university if it is to act as the conscience of the nation. — *V. G. Sinco.*

## **PARTIES AND POLITICS**

I must repeat again my conviction that parties are useful, effective, and altogether indispensable instruments of constitutional democracy. A country like the United States, Great Britain, or Sweden might wish or even choose to swap one kind of party system for another, but it could never wish or choose, not while it remained a constitutional democracy, to proceed on its way with no party system at all. The essence of democracy is politics, and politics without parties in a widespread and diverse community is really no politics at all. — *By Clinton Rossiter in Parties and Politics in America.*