

THE LEADERSHIP OF RIZAL

Fellow Filipino Citizens:

Paraphrasing a memorable statement of the celebrated philosopher George Santayana, a people that forgets its past is condemned to repeat it. It is this truth that should urge us to observe with regularity the anniversary day of the death of Dr. Jose Rizal, the greatest Filipino that adorns the pages of our history. For the life, the work, and the ideas of Dr. Rizal bring to our memory the initial awakening of our people to become conscious of an urgent need for national identity, that stirred our pride for national self-respect, and that aroused our sense for freedom and independence. People in our country and outside began to be really aware of the social, political, and religious abuses and shortcomings of the Spanish domination of the Philippines only after Jose Rizal

had exposed in his novels and other writings the intolerable conditions which our nation had been made to suffer in hopeless silence and in seemingly endless agony.

It was mainly because of the perceptive mind of Dr. Rizal that the events of 1872, which marked the martyrdom of Burgos, Gomez, and Zamora, gave rise to the resolution of some Filipinos to begin the work of putting an end to the vicious, the pernicious, and the tyrannical policies and practices of a decadent European power.

The intolerable conditions prevailing in the Philippines under that regime were boldly and graphically described in the *Noli Me Tangere*, the first novel of Dr. Rizal. The strong measures of criticism and disapproval of those conditions were subtly suggested with bitter sarcasm and caustic comment

in his second famous novel *El Filibusterismo*. The Spanish government and the religious authorities in our country were quick to place a complete and absolute ban against their entry into these islands. These restrictive official orders only enhanced their popularity increasing the eagerness of the Filipinos to read them in spite of the threat of severe punishment on all readers.

These novels together with his essays and letters to various persons in this country and in Europe directly provided many of the active Filipinos with motivating ideas that became the basic source and inspiration for some petition for redress of grievances, which when ignored rose to violent action. It may be rightly and reasonably claimed that without the works of Rizal, it would have been impossible for the Philippine Revolution to break out under the impetuous Andres Bonifacio and the impatient Emilio Aguinaldo first against Spain and then against the United States. It would have not been possible for Mabini to

participate in that Revolution under the banner of Aguinaldo and to issue his manifestos and decalogues for popular consumption.

In truth we cannot deny that without the work of Dr. Rizal expressed not only in words but also in deeds and sacrifices, the plan of a revolution could not have been considered much less hatched. Unfortunately, events proved that it was hastily carried out against the prudent, wise, and far-sighted advice and statesman-like counsel of Dr. Rizal; and as a consequence, the revolution eventually ended as an aborted enterprise.

That Rizal was a man of great ideas is accepted by all, Filipinos and foreigners, friends and enemies. But unlike many men with brilliant ideas but without the courage and manhood to face dangers they may occasion, he was ready to stand of his announced principles even to the extent of being shot and murdered in cool blood by those who could not or would not face the naked truth.

We Filipinos of today should continue with unceasing ardor to refresh our memory of the deeds, the principles, and the teachings of Dr. Rizal under the conditions that existed in our country which were dramatically depicted in his writings. We cannot afford to forget them lest they will re-appear to plague our country again with their evils. The sense of pride and self-respect could condemn us as ingrates unworthy of the sacrifice Rizal suffered for the purpose of realizing individual liberty and national independence.

In his work on the *Indolence of the Filipinos* Rizal describes the general practice of bribery and exploitation carried out thru official abuse and red tape victimizing mercilessly the people who have to deal with government officials whose services are solicited for needed or required governmental and administrative action. He declared that a government is established not for the benefit of officials but for the good and protection of the people. This is a basic prin-

ciple of democracy. A government position should be sought after not through a hypocritical and false gesture for public service when in reality, what the applicant is after is to enjoy the emoluments and perquisites attached to the office, or to make use of its power and functions to enrich the official directly or indirectly as it has been happening in many cases in our own time. To him and to all persons of his persuasion, the government that tolerates official conduct and practice designed for peculation and money-making should be destroyed peacefully if possible, but, if not possible, violently and firmly thru revolutionary methods. Such an organization is not a government for the people but a government for office holders and bureaucrats. It is a millstone that hangs around the neck of the nation and hinders its progress.

In the art of government, the interest of its officials should not be taken into account. It is only the interest of the country that has to be upheld at all cost.

Rizal criticized the intervention of church authorities in government activities. He was particularly uninhibited in his condemnation of the friars who had a decisive influence over the local government administration and over the decisions of the central government over questions that were purely secular in nature. Controversies between Filipinos and religious orders affecting property rights, civil matters, and personal affairs had to be ultimately decided by church authorities directly or indirectly. The Philippine political system was in effect a form of theocracy. The civil authority was substantially subordinated to the ecclesiastical power. The abuses committed by the avaricious Spanish priests were left uncorrected no matter how injurious they were obviously perpetrated and how unjust, even inhuman, they were in their nature and results. Driven out of their landholdings, Filipinos were allowed to suffer when their authors were the friars or the tools and agents of these privileged persons. The vic-

tims were helpless. The father of Rizal himself was deprived of the land and its products by order of these men. His mother was persecuted and thrown in jail. His brother-in-law was so hated that when he died, his body was denied interment in the ordinary burial grounds and so had to be buried in what we know to be the potter's field, the burial ground of criminals and suicide victims.

These ideas of Rizal critical of the practices prevailing in this country supported his conviction in the absolute necessity of the principle of the separation of Church and State.

The axiom oftentimes repeated in free and democratic societies that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely is pretty well exemplified in the record and in the position of the Spanish clergy in the Philippines during Rizal's time and for hundreds of years of Spain's rule in the Philippines. Arbitrary power tends to abuse and corruption. Spiritual beliefs and religious rituals taught

and used to promote fanaticism when added to wholesale ignorance and pietism produced superstitious practices; and when taken advantage of by those enjoying political power they reduced the people under these circumstances to a condition of physical, moral, political, and spiritual bondage. If in their midst there should appear a few men and women who advocated the spirit of freedom and the value of education, these men and women were branded as *filibusteros* and public enemies who should be hunted down as traitors to be imprisoned and executed.

May all of us on this memorable occasion pledge ourselves to a faithful adherence to these ideas and teachings of the greatest Filipino as the guiding light of our march towards national identity and fulfillment.

RIZAL'S IDEAS

1. As a man, as a human being, Rizal was an individualist. More than just a believer, more than just a nominal follower, he acted and lived in accordance with

his own personal convictions based upon facts he himself perceived and upon principles and ideas supported by his knowledge of science and history.

2. He was guided by his own personal understanding of what was right, or good, or true, or rational. Consequently, he avoided dogmatic practices which he considered the normal handmaiden of orthodoxy in religion, the handy tool of party politics, the basic cause of social separatism, and the usual stimulant of arrogant racism.

3. All these phases of Rizal's character made him less of an orthodox Catholic and more of a free Protestant in his religious views and life and yet he was not wholly prepared to embrace Protestantism in spite of the fact that by becoming a Protestant he would have been able to marry the accomplished daughter of a prominent gentleman in London but by his unwillingness to become a Protestant as she was. Taking into account his liberal ideas on individual freedom and religion, Rizal

placed himself side by side with a Unitarian, had he been in contact with Unitarian friends or their views. This would have happened had his travels in Europe taken him to some communities in Transylvania or had he been a student of the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and of such other Bostonians as John Adams and

John Quincy Adams and other American Olympians, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall and such famous historians as Bancroft, Parkman, Motley, and Prescott; or with scientists at that age such as Charles Darwin, Agassiz or Priestley. — VGS (delivered over the Silliman Station on April 30, 1968)

LAWS

If you laid all our laws end to end, there would be no end.

It is impossible to tell where the law stops and justice begins.

— Arthur Baer