

Bro. Sergio T. Peña, (34)

I was born on June 12, 1898 and my Birth Certificate is the fertile land upon which countless heroes have signed their names with tears and blood. My birthplace is Kawit, a small sleepy town on the shore of Manila Bay.

I am 30 million brown-skinned men and women — and millions of others who have lived and died for me. I am Lapu-Lapu, Diego Silang, Dagohoy and the Thirteen Martyrs of Cavite. I stood at Balintawak and cried the defiance of an oppressed people — a cry that went thundering around the world. I am Rizal, Bonifacio, Mabini and Del Pilar. I am Abad Santos, Quezon, Aguinaldo and Magsaysay.

I remember the battle of Zapote Bridge, Tirad Pass and Mount Samat. When call to arms was sounded, I answered and stayed until the cannons were hushed over there. I left my heroic dead on the sands of Mactan, in the jungles of Bataan, on the rocks of Corregidor and on the frozen hills of Korea.

I am Mayon and Taal Volcanoes, the timeless Ifugao rice terraces and the rich gold mines of Benguet. I am the plains of Central Luzon, the fertile valleys of Cagayan and the windswept plateaus of Bukidnon. I am Barasoain Church, the bamboo organ at Las Piñas, the Philippine deep, the tiny fishes in Lake Buhi and the sunsets on Manila Bay.

I am not big — just 114,830 square miles comprising 7,083 beautiful islands punctuating the blue Pacific. I am the abundant rain forests in Mindanao, the cane fields of Negros, the woodcarvings of Paete and the native guitars of Cebu. I am the lofty purple mountains and the lazy winding brooks, rivers and streamlets. I am the slumbering barrios — and the cities that never sleep.

I am Pancho Villa, Flash Elorde, Carlos P. Romulo and Gemma Cruz. I am thousands of schools and colleges and the countless churches with steeples pointing upward to heaven where my people worship God as they think best. I am the enchanting poems and ballads of Balagtas and Collantes, the masterpieces of Juan Luna, Amorsolo and Francisco — and my golden past is recorded in the grand marches of Julian Felipe and in the sweet haunting strains of Santiago's *kundimans*.

Yes, I am the Philippines — the Pearl of the Orient Seas, and these are the things that I am. My freedom was purchased by blood, and if the Good Lord wills it so, in this priceless liberty I have chosen to spend my days until this earth shall be no more.

May the Supreme Architect of the Universe keep me steadfast in my pursuit of happiness, harmony and solidarity — and grant me courage to keep myself free, unbending and unshackled. This is my wish and prayer — sixty nine years after I was born.

It is obvious that the assailants of churches do not go to church. They don't know what the churches are doing today.

— Roger William Riis.