

CHANGE OF HEART

The students are marching.

Restlessly.

They are storming Malacañang, protesting in the plazas, carrying placards in the streets, demonstrating in front of the palaces of Bishops, crying out — everywhere — for change.

The constitutional convention will try to change the *law*... but the real change in the country must be deeper than that. It must be a change of *heart*.

There must be a redistribution of *wealth*, a sharing of property, a sharing of what we have. We must change our economic structure, so that the poor can earn more, and own more, and live in a way that is more *human*.

We must change our political structure, so that all power does not belong to the rich; so that a poor man's voice can be heard; so that elections will be determined by *merit*, and not by money.

But this is not enough. To change the law, to change our economics, even to change our *politics* — this will be sound and fury, signifying nothing, unless we also change our hearts. The law, economics, wealth, politics — these are like *robes*, which can be rich and royal, or ragged and poor. But it is not the clothing that counts. It is not the royal robes that make a king. It is the man!

A king would still be a king, even if he were dressed like a beggar.

And a nation can be great, even if it is dressed in rags. Without industry, without gold, even without written laws, a people could be a royal nation. Nobility is in the soul.

And this is what the students are crying for — a change that is real! A change that is *internal*! A change in the *spirit*! A change of heart!

And the new constitutional convention hopes to embody that spirit in the basic law of the land.

Let us take only *one example*, of a change in our country. Let us take that what is *needed is honesty*.

If a mature man in Manila — let us say a *business man*, 43 years old, with a wife and children — if he is stopped in the street by a policeman, in the morning, when he is driving to work in his car... what does he do? He gives the policemen two pesos.

His reason is very *practical*. He says: "I was doing no wrong. I was not speeding. I was not violating any law. He has no right to stop me. But if I do *not* give him two pesos, I'll be late for *work!* He'll keep me here all day! It is like a gangster putting a gun in your ribs, and saying: 'Give me your money. I give the two pesos to free myself from *unjust vexation!*'"

If the same man is importing goods, he bribes the inspectors on the pier. He says: "If I do *not* give the money, I will not get my *goods!* It's the system — the *whole system!* If you don't *pay*, you don't get what is right-fully yours!"

When this man asks for a housing loan, from the bank, he gives a gift to the banker who approves the application. He says, later: "I don't know what that money is. Is it a *tax?* Is it a *payment?* Is it a *gift?* Is it a *bribe?* I don't know. All I know is — if you don't give the money, you don't get the *loan!*"

So he surrenders to the system. To the crooked system.

If the man gets a government contract, he kicks back 10% or 15%. He says: "What else can I do? It is the *system!* If you don't give the kick back, you don't get the contract!"

The older man, the practical man, has grown too weary to fight the system. If he *refuses* to give the policeman two pesos, and goes to court, he pays *fifty!* The man on the bench is as crooked as the policeman on the corner. There is no escape from the system.

The older man pays the inspector on the pier; he gives the "gift" to the banker; he gets the government contract by paying under the table... but the marching students — they want to *change* all this!

The older man says: "My God! To change this, you would have to rip the country up by the roots! The dishonesty is woven through the whole system!"

The students are willing to unravel the whole system. They *want* to rip the country up by the roots!

But there are two ways of doing this: the first is by *violence* — a bloody revolution. A small Communistic core — this is what they want. They say "You can not clean up the corruption in the capitalistic system. Therefore you must abolish the system! . . . You can not *extract* the graft from the democratic government. Therefore you must abolish democracy. . . . You can not even clean up the Church. The only solution is to wipe it out."

But there is another way. The peaceful way. Violence in the spirit. The sweeping change of heart.

And this will be externalized, portrayed, in the change of *law* — the change in the constitution. The changes could even be radical and revolutionary — if this were *necessary* — but accomplished peacefully, in accordance with the law.

And this second way is the way the Catholic Church has chosen. We want a change. We want — for instance — *honesty*. Top to bottom. Honesty in the policeman. Honesty in the banker. Honesty in the business man. Honesty in the politician.

Integrity. Personal integrity!

And we want to accomplish this in the only practical way in which it *can* be accomplished — by bringing about an interior change in *people* — a real change of heart.

We don't want to overthrow democracy; we want to *purify it!*

We don't want to abolish business; we don't want to execute the land-owners; we just want justice! Justice, and charity!

We don't want to wipe out the clergy; we want the priest to love the children of God as Christ loved them.

And these things *can be done!* Peacefully. *Efficiently*. Even swiftly.

This is why we are so interested in the new constitution, and in the constitutional convention. It is not because we hope to legislate morality. We know that you can not change a country by changing a *law*.

But you *can* change a country, if all the people *want to change!* If the *heart* changes first, and then all the people change the law — then we can reach the goal toward which the students are marching. And we can reach that goal without violence.

If the passion of the students could only be harnessed to the wisdom of those who are older — then we might change the face of the Philippines, and perhaps we might change the face of the world.

All of this is symbolized in the constitutional convention:

a change of structure

a change of law

a change of heart