

# FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION FOR USEFUL LIVING

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Once more I greet you and the public school teachers of the Philippines with the warmest of felicitations. Once again you are met in convention to re-dedicate yourselves to the cause of good education. I join you most happily in that re-dedication. It is one of the greatest missions in the world, it being a work of love. Some of the aspirations of that work have now become realities. Many more of them will come to fruition in the days to come. I have every reason to be optimistic, because I believe in the strength of your unity and the power of your unselfish devotion to our cause.

Although unable to be present in your gathering, to be able to report on some of the things that we have done during the year, I am eager as ever in wishing you a most fruitful convention. In this my message to you I have chosen the subject: "Fundamental Education for Useful Living."

In his book, *El Filibusterismo*, Rizal told of a spirited conversation between a lawyer and a student. The lawyer, Señor Pasta, turned to be subservient to Spanish authorities, because servility enabled him to conserve a lucrative practice of his profession. The student, Isagani, was a leader of a group of young reformers determined to found an academy. Señor

Pasta advised Isagani and his friends to desist from establishing the school.

The lawyer said, "Hands, more hands, young man, are what we need . . . hands to till the soil."

In answer, Isagani said in part, ". . . Granting that we need more farmers, I see no reason why farmers and laborers should not be given chance to be educated. They should learn to improve their work."

"Bah, Bah!" exclaimed Señor Pasta. "A farmer does not need grammar."

We could see from this bit of literature that sixty years ago, Rizal, the teacher-martyr of a freedom-hungry people, realized the need of education for the common people. In his first novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, he made Crisostomo Ibarra donate a school building. His vision of education became a reality when at Dapitan he became a teacher and taught school. Curiously enough, the school he had there was nearer to the modern concept of the community school than most of our schools today. While at present many teachers still cling to the outworn idea of confining their work to teaching in a classroom, Rizal, in his time, considered that teaching must reach the community and influence it to work for higher standards of living. Helped by his stu-

dents and the people, he built a water system with such crude resources as roughly hewn stone and frail bamboo poles that might have discouraged a less determined teacher. On his initiative, the town plaza was beautified and kept clean. With his winnings from a lottery, he caused to be set up a street lighting system for the town. He taught farming and raising of animals. Going still further, he organized a producers' cooperative among coconut planters. As if these activities were not enough, he ministered to the needs of the sick and continued research work on the flora and fauna of Mindanao.

Consciously or unconsciously he was developing a type of education that would come to fruition sixty years later in the community-centered education now being implemented all over the Philippines. This type of education is identified as fundamental education by UNESCO — fundamental in the sense that it is the minimum education needed by the people for useful living. Below that minimum enlightenment, the people would live as slaves to superstition, grovel pitifully in want, and become easy prey to evil propaganda.

This is the lot of the dupes of Communist agitators in Central Luzon. There, the misery of the "have nots" was turned into a soul-searing hatred for the "haves" by heartless exploitation and unrelenting abuse. There, the ignorance of simple-minded peasants was turned into uncontrollable violence by Red agents provocateurs. In their wake they leave nothing but ashes where once stood prosperous villages, wailing where once was heard laughter.

We have sought to stop the evil pitting force against force. We have mobilized the whole armed might of the Republic to end violence. Yet, this is but an emergency remedy. The crisis will still go on even, after communist-inspired rebellion shall have been broken by our armed forces. Suffering and bitterness would remain. That is why education must come in to bring understanding to those cheated by Communist lies. That is why education must shed light wherever men have been compelled to grope helplessly in the dark by illiteracy. That is why education must offer salvation from miserable living by enabling the individual to become a more efficient bread earner. Only by thus following up the victory in battles with the work of education can we win for ourselves permanent security and peace.

What fundamental education must we provide for our citizens? Ordinarily one would be tempted to over-simplify the problem, and say that literacy is all that basic education should guarantee. No more grievous mistake can be made than this. Literacy is not the end all or the be all of fundamental education. To be literate doubtless increases one's power for good but unluckily it also increases one's power for evil. The Germans under Hitler, the Italians under Mussolini, and the Japs under Tojo were among the most literate peoples of the world. Their literacy only made them harder to beat in World War II and made them more ingenious and terrible in wielding instruments of destruction. Among our countrymen today, the literate dissidents are far more dangerous than their blind followers who are sacrificed as expendables in skirmishes with government troops.

So we must anchor fundamental education on values of greater significance than mere literacy. For the individual, fundamental education should mean useful living. For the state it must assure useful citizenship by every individual.

Useful living by the citizen may be helped by the book learning commonly dished out in classrooms by good teachers of the old school, but book learning is far from enough. It must find application here and now. Useful living is best learned by useful living. To achieve it, book learning is not a separate preparatory step. Knowledge stored in books must function in life before it can be said to have real value. Consider how Rizal satirized the bookworm type of teaching done by the physics teacher in *El Filibusterismo*. His recital of lessons with ears sensitized to errors of the hapless students called upon to recite reduced teaching to nothing more than making each student a "parrot". So when one student was asked whether a mirror would still be a mirror if its quicksilver layer is taken off and replaced by *bibingka*, the harassed student blurted out, "Sir, we shall have *bibingka*." A more amusing example of *reductio ad absurdum* can scarcely be found anywhere else.

Again Rizal, in this instance, seemed to have developed an educational belief in advance of the ridiculous pedantry of his time. No wonder he concluded the story about the antics of the physics teacher by saying, "The scolding of the teacher lasted until the bell rang when the two hundred and thirty-four pupils left the classroom as ignorant as when they entered it. Everyone wasted a good hour

and part of his self-respect as well as his love for learning."

We must turn to the book of life for the vital subject matter of teaching. That book of life can only be read in the life that is going on in homes and communities. What are its essentials? First, is **useful living through improved occupations**. In a rice producing village, rice culture is the crucial element in the economics of the people's livelihood. So must it be too in their education for the purpose of increasing productive power and raising standards of living. In a fishing village, the catching, processing and marketing of fish, is the vital concern of life and so also with education for it. Fundamental education must therefore match occupations and improve them besides.

In our country, fundamental education must stress efficient production of rice, corn, coconuts, abaca, tobacco and other wealth-giving plants. The torrential rains and devastating typhoons that seem to have given our country preferential attention in cosmogonic arrangement must feature prominently in the life adjustment of the people. Education cannot scare away tempests but it can make man more intelligent in dealing with the elements. Aside from this, fundamental education must enable us to conserve our soil, save our forests, use judiciously our fish resources, and exploit intelligently our mines. The diwata-propitiating farmer, the kaingin backwoodsman, the fisherman-dynamiter—all must come under the influence of fundamental education. Their undesirable occupational practices must be replaced by sane methods. With your fruitful guidance and dynamic leadership, our country

has already made a good beginning in all these points I have just discussed. Nothing in this, my talk with you will make me happier than to say that I shall be able to report to UNESCO of your wonderful work in putting into effect UNESCO's program of fundamental education through our community school movement.

Let me now say something about health. This is the element needed for useful living, hence it must be a very vital part of our fundamental education program. To the teacher, loyal to the Rizalian ideal in education, it does not mean memorizing health rules stunged in endless succession **ad nauseam**. Neither does it mean naming the 206 bones of the human skeleton from the metatarsals of the toes to the temporals of the head. Fundamental education in health means scientific knowledge turned into action. It means cleaning up of homes and communities, eradicating pests of all kinds, insuring safe water supply for all, disposing waste to prevent the spread of diseases, improving dietary habits to increase work power, conquering superstition and quackery, and controlling epidemic to reduce deaths. These cannot be done in any way other than active collaboration of the people in each community. Tuberculosis that reduces our manpower by one person every fifteen minutes is too big an adversary for one government health worker fighting it unaided. Other pulmonary diseases that deprive our country of one Filipino every ten minutes must be met with a determined community effort. Beriberi, malaria, dysentery and other great killer cannot be vanquished by mere classroom discussions. What have we in our respective

community done to these sowers of death? Doubtless you and the teachers, nurses, doctors and other health workers serving with you have done very much already in health teaching for which the nation is gratefully indebted. If I discuss the matter here it is to remind ourselves that health work is never finished, and that, therefore, we must re-dedicate ourselves with renewed vigor to the task still to be done.

A third factor in fundamental education is home and family life. The family must be made the indestructible bastion of democracy against the inroads of communism. As long as we preserve the strong family ties we have inherited from our forefathers, we will succeed in arresting the growth of communism. Communism alienates children from parents because it cannot stand competition with the family in winning the loyalty of the individual. The family wins by affection; communism triumphs only by coercion. If family solidarity is strong, communism would wither and die. The united family would resist any attempt of totalitarianism to subvert the natural love of children for their parents. Such family would not submit to having its children become the property of a politburo to be transformed by Marxist teachings into dissidents and atheists. It would assert its natural right to rear children in a home and shape the children's destiny in the ways of freemen.

There is still one danger that the family must guard against, and that is moral decadence. President Quezon rose to sublime heights of statesmanship when he declared in 1938:

"We, the Filipinos of today, are soft, easy-going. Our ten-

dency is towards parasitism. We are uninclined to sustained, strenuous effort. We lack earnestness. Face-saving is the dominant note in the confused symphony of our existence. Our sense of righteousness is often dulled by the desire of personal gain. Our norm of conduct is generally prompted by expediency rather than by principle. We show a failing in that superb courage that impels action because it is right, even at the cost of self-sacrifice. Our greatest fear is not to do wrong, but that of being caught doing wrong. We are frivolous in our view of life. Our conception of virtue is many times conventional. We take our religion lightly. We think that lip-service and profession are equivalent to deep and abiding faith. We are inconstant; we lack perseverance; the first obstacle baffle us, and we easily admit defeat. The patriotism of many of us is skin-deep, incapable of inspiring heroic deeds. There are those among us who are apt to compromise with ethical principles and regard truth as not incompatible with misrepresentation and deceit."

President Quezon's appraisal thirteen years ago is as valid today as when he made it then. Perhaps we have gone down even more. Under the stress of war, when survival was hanging in the balance, our people agonized through the painful days of Bataan and Corregidor, and finally came out with flying colors in valor and devotion to freedom. Unfortunately, the post-war years enthroned greed and selfishness so that today moral rehabilitation is as urgent a problem as ever in spite of the sub-

stantial gains which your unflinching devotion to education has already won.

It is the home that needs to do much of the job that the school by its limited tutelage cannot do completely. Due to the rise of the school as a potent factor in socializing the individual, many parents have abdicated their responsibility of building character. When their children go wrong, they blame the delinquency upon the teachers. Not to be outdone in the pastime of "passing the buck," some teachers blame the situation upon the parents. Mutual recrimination only adds injury to the already morally injured youngster. It is particularly to remedy this sad state of affairs that the community-centered school can be of immense help. In it the teacher and the parent are partners—planning, executing, and evaluating together a school program suited to their particular community.

In stressing the moral aspect of home and family living, it is not my intention to ignore its other aspects. There is much to improve in our housing and the practices connected with it. Sanitation of kitchens, washrooms, and yards has not kept up with the standards taught repeatedly during the last fifty years. In fact the pool of mud under the *batalan* is all too glaring a challenge to sanitation that does not escape the eye of foreign visitors who go to our villages. Animals scavenging for food have not disappeared from our streets even in urban communities. It is to enable our people to enjoy proper housing that I authored a bill, now a law, that would help families acquire suitable housing quarters. This is my modest part of the common task in which you,

as model home makers, have accomplished much.

One more feature of fundamental education and I am through. I have in mind citizenship. This is the most important factor. The public schools have produced some of the greatest citizens that any country can boast of. To the late President Roxas, the public schools can point with pride as a shining example of the best that it can produce. His successor, President Quirino, is also a prized product of the public school system. Secretary Romulo, whose leadership in UNITED NATIONS has won world-wide respect and acclaim, learned his A-B-C in that same system. Leaders, living and dead, who have made their mark in government, business, industry, science, education, and other aspects of living, owe their rise mainly to the education they had obtained from the nation's schools. The heroes of Leyte, Bataan, Corregidor and scores of other past battlefields, and their worthy successors fighting the battle of the free world in Korea, could trace the origin of their undying devotion to democracy to the teachings of the public schools. I can go on naming many more, but it would not be necessary, for my purpose is to tell how proud we must be to possess a long line of worthy and honorable citizens, thanks to the work of the public schools.

This rich heritage should be an inexhaustible fount of inspiration for you in making fundamental education yield the fruits of good citizenship among our people. In this great task we have been the fortunate beneficiary of the translations in Tagalog, Ilocano, Mara-

nao, Pangasinan, Pampango, Samareño and in Cebuano of the Universal Declaration of the Fundamental Human Rights, for which we now acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the superintendents and teachers of Cebu, Samar, Pampanga, Bulacan, Pangasinan, and Lanao. We hope to be able through the UNESCO—Philippine Educational Foundation to distribute printed copies of the translations for use with our people. We cannot take our rights for granted. They cannot mean much unless we seek consciously to translate them into deeds. Then, too, they can easily be abused or abridged by anarchists and tyrants. Our continued enjoyment of the blessings of freedom requires ceaseless vigilance even against our own-selves. Indeed in everyone of us there is a little Mussolini that wants to subvert freedom by resisting the safeguards accompanying the proper observance of rights.

In this we need much educating. It is unfortunate that we have so strengthened the national government at the expense of local power for self-help. It is feared that local initiative is on the wane. The hundreds of requests that come to my desk as your senator attest to this decline in local creative power. I have had requests for national aid to make minor repairs and construction. In a few cases even the building of a school fence had to be raised to the category of a project requiring my attention. Yet tax collections to raise the money that numberless requests seek to spend had not always showed the result expected in former years. Tax evasion has become a delinquency comparable with theft. Indeed it is theft for it

amounts to a deprivation of what our people need to run our schools and support our armed forces, to say nothing of the many other services our government renders to the citizen. Fundamental education must include then the teaching of the duties of the citizen, one of the most important of which is the obligation to pay taxes honestly and faithfully. I have no doubt that you will support Secretary of Finance Pedrosa in the current drive to improve tax collection.

I have indicated the bold features of fundamental education as contained in the current community school movement sponsored by the Bureau of Public Schools. Where does UNESCO come in?

Two months ago UNESCO signed with the Philippines an agreement under which it will spend this year ₱226,000 worth of technical assistance in the form of services of experts, scholarships and technical equipment for fundamental education. UNESCO is going to assist us to set up three pilot projects in fundamental education: one in a rural area, another in an urban area and a third in a rural-urban area combined. The goal is to help raise standards of living in the communities affected. I must say that significant beginnings have been made in Cagayan, Bataan, Iloilo, Cotabato, Negros Oriental, Bohol, and practically all divisions, and I will only be too happy if, by your continued work, I shall be able to tell UNESCO that in OPERATIONS FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION, the Philippines is progressing steadily to the decided objectives.

To help implement the objectives of fundamental education on a non-government level, we have organ-

ized the UNESCO—Philippine Education Foundation. It is strictly a non-profit organization in which the officers serve on a purely volunteer basis without compensation. Although the foundation includes in its basic program science and culture in addition to education, the main focus of attention is fundamental education. We ask you to give us the honor of joining us in this work and demonstrate to UNESCO that we are in it, not only for the many reconstruction aids, scholarships and technical services we have been able to obtain but also because we are willing to share in the cost of making UNESCO a potent world force for peace. We cannot attain that peace as long as we live next door to poverty, misery and ignorance. That is why your collaboration as members of the UNESCO—Philippine Educational Foundation will add much more power to UNESCO to enable it to carry out successfully its global attack against ignorance and superstition, against misery and want. May we hope that you all will accord us the honor of your membership and those of your teachers in the UPEF?

In closing I quote the words of a wise man. William James, the author of a source book in psychology and a philosopher of stature among thinkers once said: "This universe will never be completely good as long as one being is unhappy, as long as one poor cockroach suffers the pangs of unrequited love." In UNESCO we have a fresh hope of making our world a happier place for the human family. To achieve this goal I believe in putting into practice Ralph Waldo Emerson's Fifth Gospel: "to live, let live and help live."