

Think on These Things. . . •

• Walls are Crumbling

Senator Eva Estrada Kalaw •

*Address by the Senator from Pangasinan and Manila at the Convention of the Ninth Masonic District held at Villa Lolita, Taytay, Rizal on July 4, 1967. Sister Kalaw is a Past Matron, T. M. Kalaw Chapter #9, OES, San Juan Rizal.*

I feel deeply honored by your invitation to address you on a subject in which perhaps all of you are more conversant. This being the ecumenical decade, many thinking Christians everywhere have paused to examine their beliefs and their positions on centuries-old controversies that have riven the confraternity of Christians the world over. And so, indeed, perhaps it is time for me to set forth a few of my own thoughts on ecumenism.

At the outset, let me state that I come from a family which, not by deliberate design, is ecumenical.

My husband Teddy as you know is a Mason.

I am a Catholic, and so are all my children.

Two of my brothers are Protestants each belonging to a different sect, while one of my sisters-in-law has not discovered religion yet, though she suspects there must be a God somewhere.

We are committed to a wide diversity in creeds. We disagree about many things, but through it all, we have a unity of spirit and purpose that allows us to be different but nonetheless trusting and happy together.

When I was campaigning for the senate two years ago, I had occasion to say my first prayers for the success of the ecumenical movement.

I could not get the official blessings of the Catholic hierarchy because my husband is identified with Free-

masonry, and I could not court the consolidated votes of a supposed to be powerful Filipino Christian group, because another sister-in-law was too well identified with Catholic Action in the Philippines to be any comfort to that sect.

The fresh wind of ecumenism was then all of two years sweeping across Europe, but it had not yet brought its beneficial effects to our people. My first prayers for its success may have been tinged with personal reasons, but reviewing the great and continuing transformation of our church, my prayers that it succeed seem to have been answered.

Many walls of bigotry are now crumbling and the dams that have prevented other tributaries from flowing in the same big Christian river of grace are collapsing in the wake of a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians.

Unity in Christ is the central theme of the Ecumenical movement.

—Unity in Christ, and not necessarily the Catholic Church.

—A renewal of our faith, and a reformation of our church, which must translate the teachings of Christ into the idioms of modern life, so that Christians everywhere may realize anew that these teachings have as great a validity for our mode of life, as they had when they were first enunciated two thousand years ago.

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The ecumenical movement indicates the new initiatives and activities that must be encouraged according to the various needs of the Church as "communion of saints" and as opportunities offered to promote Christian unity.

My daughter Chingbee, with a more realistic outlook characteristic of her a-go-go generation favors a pragmatic definition that shows ecumenism as an enlightened spirit that stresses not how different we are, but how deeply similar we really are. It is a movement that measures not how wide are our differences, but how closely our common Christian beliefs hold us together.

As a result of the spirit of ecumenism that has swept across the world, Catholicism, during the past decade, has changed more rapidly than at any other period in its two-thousand year history.

When the late Pope John first opened the windows to allow fresh air to come to the Vatican, Catholics all over the world perceived the ecumenical spirit and looked with fresh insight into such secular problems as poverty, ignorance, disease, war, and social and economic development of potentially progressive nations. This is a counter-reformation precipitated, not by another schism, but by a realization that times indeed have changed and the church intends fully to keep stride with the pace and pattern of these changed and changing times.

The Ecumenical movement necessarily places the task of renewal and reform where it belongs — with the individual Christian himself.

Even as Catholics are enjoined by the decree to be concerned about their separated brethren, their primary duty is — in the words of the historic decree —

"to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic house-

hold itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have been handed down from Christ through the Apostles."

Ecumenism is contrition and humility — for it acknowledges that division among Christians is the doing and responsibility of both Catholics and non-Catholics equally.

Ecumenism is also social reform along Christian principles, or as the Decree defines it, it is

—A just appreciation of the dignity of the human person;

—The promotion of the blessings of peace;

—The application of gospel principles to social life;

—And advancement of the arts and sciences in a Christian spirit.

Charity is ecumenism in its highest expression. Here I speak of charity in the sense meant by St. Paul — that of the three cardinal virtues, the greatest is charity.

Through it all we must remember that all who pray to "Our Father" are in spirit *one*, though by persuasion belonging to different creeds and sects.

To me the most significant meaning that has emerged from the Vatican Council is the statement in modern terms of its mission and its gospel, in a world much altered by mental, spiritual and material revolutions.

And in response, Catholics everywhere have started to examine whether the Christian gospel is indeed still relevant to the life of modern man and has urged the church to prove whether it still possesses the indwelling spirit and force to pit against such recent tragedies of history as the Nazism that flourished in a Christian country, and the Communism that within the same decade — took root in one of the most religious of societies.

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As this reexamination and reform take place, we all realize that changes in ritual will be more easily effected than the actual individual rejuvenation that must come, in order to infuse the Church Militant with new vigor and new spirit.

But in a country so steeped in superstition that a motley aggregation can assume a religious posture, the greater challenge is to make religion more meaningful to everyone, by demonstrating in the "common fair of human life" that its principles and rubrics can be practised through each day's tasks and duties performed "by sun and candlelight."

But how in the peculiar milieu in the Filipino society can the Christian faith be kept? Is it possible to be successful in business and abide by the Ten Commandments?

Or can one become a successful politician and not violate the Christian ethic of uncompromising truthfulness and honesty.

Or is it even possible to engage in the pursuit of one's daily bread in a society as competitive as ours is and observe the law of love.

In a world where there are crimes of such horror as Lucila Lulu's murder, Maggie de la Riva's kidnapping, whence the sermon on the Mount and turning the other cheek?

In a society where "lagay" is an institution, corruption a way of life for many, what of the Christian ideal of personal sacrifice and public service?

These questions have been asked painfully and sincerely by some people — not too many. And the questioner has been immediately categorized either as too naive or too other-worldly. No bets are made on his survival in a world ruled by "fang and claw."

Our Atlases and books of history as

well as tourist literature take pride in mentioning that the Philippines is the only Christian nation in Asia. By this proud claim of Christianity, we seem to want others to esteem our country as enlightened, progressive, cultured, etc., in short, as endowed with all the characteristics of an ideal Christian society.

Perhaps it is time to examine this proud claim and assess exactly how Christian we are, or what religion has meant for our people.

For it seems to me that for a great majority of our people, Christianity is a set of rubrics superimposed on an unwritten body of private beliefs, augmented by superstition, but which, however, may be conveniently set aside as circumstance and need dictate.

Thus it appears that a Catholic who has completed a novena for nine first Fridays is assured of salvation, feels he can violate a few commandments with some impunity because of the implied insurance from hell.

Thus it is that on holidays, we render both thanksgiving and cause offense to the Almighty for the lavish squander of our meager blessings.

Thus it is that, with a capricious interpretation of how God's grace works, it is not out-of-the-ordinary to violate the more interesting commandments on Friday, confess on Saturday, and go to mass on Sunday — and be acclaimed paragons of virtue.

Somehow our people have not yet forgotten any of the old gods it had worshipped before Christianity reached our shores. In our death rites, we implore the forgiveness and blessings of the Lord, but also commend the souls of the departed to the unknown and unidentified gods who must be lurking around us — and who are placated by invocations and incantations of ancient rituals.

Of recent and painful recollection is the tragedy of Lapiang Malaya —

doomed to be a tragedy from the start, and a tragedy worse compounded by the irresponsible response of the government.

After the slaughter, all the questions were asked: how is it possible that in this day and age, grown men should be led like so many lambs to slaughter, with pebbles as their shield and bolos as their might — girded for battle by the exhortations of a feeble old man who evoked the vision of a material heaven for all who believed and listened.

Surely this is not an isolated case.

Surely, we must not say: but that is merely the Lapiang Malaya — who are just a minority of our people.

How many of our people turn, not to doctors or surgeons, but to a barrio medicine man, who mumbles incantations and makes cabalistic marks on foreheads and arms — to ward off sickness.

How many others indeed are the instances to prove that aside from the Triune God, we keep hallowed in the niches of our mind, lesser gods and spirits we dare not offend? How many supernatural entities do we

people our woods and forests, our rivers and hills? What *kapres* and *tikbalangs*, what *anitos* and *diwatas*?

Far more relevant than ecumenism to our times is religion, and the challenge to make it a practical, and working guideline for our lives.

Each, within his own Christian denomination, we must learn to understand still more clearly and appreciate fully the imperishable tenets of our creed.

With a fair, clear understanding of our faith, we can be, both by precept and by example, worthy exponents of our Christian religion — not only for the edification of the many but also to give meaning and depth to our own inner lives.

Remembering that it is not what divides us that motivates our actions, but the things that unite us, the enlightened sector of every community must rise to take the lead in demonstrating how concerted action, among a people united under a common ideal and purpose, can "move mountains."

The Masons being the cream of our nation's manhood, has clearly the obligation to show the way.  $\Delta$

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returned to the Philippines in 1892, he was immediately exiled to Dapitan where he remained until 1896. At Dapitan he met a beautiful Irish-American lady by the name of Josephine Bracken, an adopted child of Mr. Tauffer, whom Rizal operated on to regain his sight. The two became in love with each other and applied to be married, but Rizal became a Mason in Europe and no priest would marry them unless Rizal retracted Masonry. Here we come to most controversial portion of the life of Dr. Jose Rizal. We of the Catholic faith believe that Rizal retracted and abjured his attacks against the Church. There

is a group of our countrymen who still believe that Rizal did not in any way renounce Masonry and all his other acts contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church. Be that as it may, it is not for us here to prove who of the two contending groups is right. Suffice it for us that all Filipinos irrespective of creed, recognize him as the greatest of all Filipino heroes and that we are all together in commemorating his birth anniversary.

In July, 1896, Rizal was allowed to leave the Philippines for Cuba, but before he reached Spain an order from Manila was received recalling him to Manila. He was immediately im-

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