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*Student Perceptions of the Counselor**

ALBEN G. BARTOLOME

A month ago, I was asked by our guidance counselor, Fr. Paul Limgenco, to talk with you about the role of the counselor. I felt hesitant at first. What do I have to say to counselors? I haven't even thought about such an undertaking before. I guess the confidence he showed me gave me the courage to be with you this afternoon. As I found out, the thought of speaking with you was a real opportunity to think about "the things that really matter in life"—the concern of counselors which is personal development. I have much to be thankful for to you and to Fr. Limgenco, for this opportunity.

The theme of this 8th Annual Convention of the Philippine Guidance and Personnel Association, Inc.— "The Counselor in a Changing Society"—is most apt. It reveals a certain vulnerability, a responsiveness, to the intensifying problems and consciousness of our times. No one can separate himself, no one can do anything outside of society. The phrase, "a changing society," can be taken to mean a mere change of routine, a fad, or a simple part of the growth of life. But I am sure that many of us have felt and have discerned that the changing society of the Philippines has a movement which is dynamic, violent and revolutionary, while at the same time being constructive. Dynamic because the force that is generated to

* An address delivered on the occasion of the 8th Anniversary of the Philippine Guidance and Personnel Association, Inc., 3 June 1972.

initiate and risk changes ensues from the very lives, sufferings and aspirations of our people. Violent because it is a force willing to destroy obstacles, pave its own way and dictate its own terms. Revolutionary because it imposes itself on the status quo, transforming our nation into a human, just and Filipino society. Constructive because it seeks to rebuild and adopt new institutions for the humanization of the *tao*.

The post-war period was a time of transition, reconstruction and rehabilitation. A time when so much destruction of human lives and property, human sufferings and dislocations, led to the obsession for economic security and the reign of law and order that prevailed before the war—a yearning for the peace and order of the past. Again today, we find ourselves in an intensely transitional society. We no longer see the ruins of buildings, bomb craters and war deaths. What we perceive are the evils of our present socio-economic disorder where destruction is less obvious, even seemingly absent, but in a way more insidious, more destructive, more diabolical. And why? Because the evils of the present socio-economic disorder hide in the guise of skyscrapers, luxurious villages, elite schools, smiling politicians, international economic aids with all their entanglements, an increasing GNP together with an increasing per capita income (while in reality, the rich get richer and the poor more and more destitute and hopeless), and recently the notorious Quintero exposé of the Constitutional Convention, the most sublime assembly of men dedicated to the making of our Fundamental Law. More diabolical because these social evils are conveniently attributed to a split-level Christianity and a double standard of values, phenomena which are the concern of the sociologists, not the everyday men on the streets who comprise the major reality of our society—It's their problem not mine. More insidious because it is the failure of our spirit as a people to commit ourselves to the task of humanization and the creation of a community founded on social justice, communion and love. A tragedy of the spirit which is the real concern of counselors in their task of helping in the development of persons. A problem so challenging that it demands persons vulnerable enough to

throb with the lives of other people, addressing their present crises and needs, willing and passionate to change violent and irrelevant institutions that hinder the full flowering of the person whether he be rich or poor.

The student counselor, I believe, must address himself to the task of humanization and Filipinization of a Filipino society undergoing and initiating dynamic, violent and revolutionary changes towards the creation of a new social order.

Discerning the role of the student counselor in our times is a problematic demanding a wholistic and integrated approach. The role of the student counselor is also that of an educator, but more challenging, perhaps, because he is in a more intimate relationship with the students—he counsels them on problems of growing up, self-identification, self-actualization and the other intangibles of personal development. Because he is dealing with the student as person, he has to communicate with a reality so rich that each person demands a totally new relationship. The person is made up of a corporation of individuals, influences and events: his parents, his brothers and sisters, relatives, acquaintances, personal experiences, environment, socio-economic status, culture, society, religion and so many other factors. The student counselor is called upon to understand students that they may know themselves as they really are. He is called upon to participate fully and directly in the formation of values, of character which Martin Buber defines as, "the link between what this individual is and the sequence of his actions and attitudes." The counselor comes to grips with such perennial questions as "Who am I?" and "What am I to live for?" In a society that has grown more and more complex and conscious through mass media, books from all over the world especially the Third World, education and rise in the standards of living of some; these questions have also intensified in urgency that they cause a truly existential anxiety for the meaning of life itself. A counselor very well knows that the formation of values is not an abstract goal but is the very dynamic for human constructiveness or destructiveness. How does a person relate in the differentiated and particularized situations of life to himself, his family,

his friends, his beloved, his group, his government, his countrymen, the world and God? Ultimately, we see that the development of an individual into an actualizing person is the progress of the whole society itself.

Our generation has a consuming passion for genuineness that the question, "Is he open?" or "Am I open enough?" has become a cliché, a cliché which can be indicative of a growing confusion of what openness and genuineness mean. I can even say that we have an obsession for openness and being real—an obsession which is the product of a society grown satiated by useful conventions that espouses to live for a certain value and actually does the very opposite of what honesty and service demands, because dishonesty and corruption is easier, more convenient and popular. Why is it that our affluent society has great numbers of social dropouts and drug-users? I come from a Catholic University. In high school, I was given a one-sided view of life founded on Christian principles of education as interpreted by my mentors—basically, that one develops himself first for the sake of giving service to others on the principles of Christian love, honesty, goodness and justice. The question, which, I am sure, many of my fellow students will ask is, "Are these principles livable?" Sure, they teach us these values in school but how many people actually practice these beautiful doctrines in their businesses, community life (if there is one) and even in their families? The student is torn in the conflict of a split-level Christianity, "to Mass on Sunday, to hell on Monday" values, in the formative stages of his life when his character is just being developed. Who are the people who react violently? At once, student activists and hippies come out of one's mouth. They form the two extremes of the youth spectrum—one imposing their values influenced by foreign ideologies and changing society on their ideologies' terms. The other are social dropouts who try to live in a world of their own making—that is, if they are not caught by the authorities and, if caught, they have the necessary ₱10-₱20 bribe money for possession of marijuana and drugs.

Rooted in this rejection of society is a rejection of the roles which are imposed on us students not only by our culture but also by our own educational institutions which have ceased to be effective in enabling us men to change our relations with nature and unjust social orders. Up to now students are treated as temporary social liabilities who do not share in the building of a human society, who are in a period of incubation for future productivity. But in what kind of system, an educational system divorced and disjunct from our own society, an education espousing a Western taste and sense of values? As long as our educational system espouses self-development for others without providing the means, outlets and opportunities to enable students to realize their own people and culture; as long as values are merely said and are not lived in the campus and students are not given a significant role in nation-building and community development; we students will always protest and agitate for meaningful and revolutionary changes. In the final reckoning, the effectiveness of the student counselor depends on the educational system he belongs to.

Let me offer an equation for the term, "Guidance counselor." Guidance and counselor is equal to one authority plus another authority giving the sum of two authorities too much. I believe that the concept of authority is another source of problems for the counselor. We have grown distrustful of authorities with their sanctimonious attitudes about what one must do and what one must not do. What does good citizenship mean when one sees the nature of our government officials from the lowest employee to the Philippine presidency? What does the Quintero-Marcos controversy mean? What is democracy when the US, the vanguard and supreme model, is proved to be an oppressive imperialist power controlling our government not so much by actual official presence as in the dynamics of economic monopoly which many of our politicians are just too eager to cater to? What are Christian values like poverty when the Catholic Church herself is found having great material possessions and even an air-conditioned cathedral while Tondo slum-dwellers are the last to receive Church finances and aid and only after so much demonstrations and exposés? What

are Catholic schools when their students just manage to serve the interests of the status quo in their passion to join the in-crowd of *Chronicle* readers? What are real values and what are mere social conveniences? Is honesty only when it is more convenient, virginity because one's parents say so? Who is to answer? Not the authorities, for they have deprived themselves of credibility. It is so easy for the young inquiring mind to equate values with social institutions. Are our social institutions still relevant? the government? the Church? Either these institutions are relevant or the values they stand for are fake. Reflect on the increasing numbers of student activists espousing communism to democratic socialism. How about the social drop-outs in the hippies and the proliferation of pervert groups committed to sex and violence? How about the number of students who have abandoned their Church practices as personally meaningless and a tool for the status quo? These accusations can be vigorously defended. It can always be said that values stand independent of social institutions. What values? The reality of the concrete stands—that absolute values are being discarded and new ideals embraced and violently defended and pursued.

The student of today is a besieged individual. We are trying as best we can to address ourselves to our history, our society and the needs of our fellow Filipinos. We want to find the reality and truth animating accepted values, and if need be reject them and live for new values. On the more individual level we want and crave for genuineness and openness and yet the fear of being known. Take one of our words: *hasel*. When one is irritated, he says, *nahahasel ako*. When one is hurt, *nahahasel ako*. When one is angry, *hasel ako*. When one does not want to inconvenience another, *baka mahasel, kita*. *Hasel* is a vague word. It is non-committal. And yet, it says, "If you know me, then you will understand. If you know me, care for me, and feel with me, then even my vagueness is clear to you." I guess that word can symbolize us. We are confused, but we are searching as best and as honestly as we can. We would want so much to have a hierarchy of values which we could hold as absolute and eternal values. You tell

us a certain set of values is real, but we have to find out for ourselves. We have to experience them for ourselves. We trust you and distrust you, too.

College is an uncomfortable time. It is a time when we want so much to give of ourselves, and it is hard to accept that we are temporary social liabilities. We feel and believe we should not accept this. We want to build with you. We want to be one with ourselves and with our less fortunate brothers and sisters. We want to have a concrete and real education, a genuine personal development in a knowing and, at the same time, a doing way, not an education which is just a mere exercise of intellectual futility in theorizing unlivable values and irrelevant techniques. What we want is an education that teaches *praxis*, the unity of theory and practice. We don't want to be alienated from our own people. We question, but we question because we want to find the truth of our own lives. We want to test our so called "values" against or with the values of other people we encounter—whether they be Christian, Marxist, Socialist or plain conservative. We are just waking up from the onesidedness of our high-school education and our double-standard society. We want to know what real living is. Do you give us a real education in that we get to understand ourselves more, our fellow Filipinos and the many ways in which we can eliminate oppressive elements and structures in ourselves or as manifested in the institutional violence existing in our society? We are insecure but it is better to remain this way than to grow contented in the security of the status quo. We may make mistakes, and you may try to stop us. Maybe, you have made too few little mistakes and have committed the big ones like making personal security your end-all and be-all.

What are my values? How am I to respond? These are some of our questions, our dear counselors. Please remember that we prize our freedom and self-dignity very dearly. We need your guidance, but not an authoritarian, unilateral and paternalistic guidance. We may be putting you on a tightrope but we also are on a tightrope, and we are still in the process

of making our lives. We realize that we have so much to learn from you, but you also have so much to learn from us.

Admittedly, I have at a certain point in my talk with you not distinguished between counselors, educators and elders. I feel that I cannot just categorize and compartmentalize your roles through the whole course of this talk. You are our elders, that is why you are our counselors and educators.

The role of the student counselor is ambiguous and challenging. Ambiguous because the student counselor is identified by the students with the administration and faculty. But at the same breath, the primary concern of the student counselor is the studentry. In these days when students are demanding more and more autonomy, independence and participation in the decision-making processes of the university, the counselor has to maintain a firm sense of impartiality and genuine concern for the studentry. It is ambiguous because in a very real sense, the student counselor, if he is to be effective, is neither fully a part of the administration nor the studentry. Challenging because his task is to facilitate the movement towards a sense of community in the university so essential to the direct involvement of the students with their society once they graduate. Challenging, too, because we can no longer admit the harmony of administration, faculty, students, maintenance and personnel employees that was taken for granted before. We find that there is a very real polarization of forces in many universities between these sectors. The student counselor can be effective in the formation of community if he devotes himself to the communication problems in the university that impede unity and the harmony that should exist even if there are conflicting interests. He should try to address himself to the many groups existing in the campus, the activist groups, the hippies, the "queers," the intellectuals and the regular barkadas in the studentry. The presence of biases, misinterpretations and misconceptions make the ideal of an academic community remain a mere ideal of ink on paper. The student counselor should also be given participation and voting powers in the policy-making bodies of the universities.

The student counselor is not only the "bridge over troubled waters" when a person has a problem of academics or relationships but also the bridge to unite the university for a real academic community, relevant and Filipino.

In parting, I would like to say that in the final analysis, the counselor does not so much give his psychological expertise or training, but he gives of himself in a living relationship with the other—his warmth, sensitivity and responsiveness. It is his personal vocation to witness to the promise that in a world seemingly grown cold and harsh, such eternal values as truth, goodness, moral courage and love are liveable. It is only your personal example that can show us this. It is a tall order. I believe that we are not alone though, because in the midst of all our inadequacies and limitations is a *Personal Power* eternally with us.