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The Problem of Cultural Diversity*

FRANCISCO ARANETA

WHEN the Spaniards came to our islands and proceeded to stake out their claims, they were not particularly concerned with cultural grouping or unity. The group of islands that emerged as their colony possessed no unifying characteristics which would distinguish them as a unit from the islands that surrounded them. The mountain groups of northern Luzon, for example, were united by closer cultural ties to the mountain groups of Formosa than to the lowland tribes that had come to Luzon in subsequent centuries. The Magin-danaos were far more akin to their brothers in Borneo than they were to the Visayas of the north. The Pampangos spoke a language that echoed Javanese origins but had relatively little resemblance to the language of the people to the east and west of them. Thus the Philippines as we know it today received its first quasi national organization from its unification within the jurisdictional influence of the Spanish conquest.

The islands became subject to the government of Spain and to the cultural influences the Spaniards brought with them. The main cultural influence, of course, was that of the Christian faith, but it extended as well to language, art, education, social customs and community development. Thus the cultural penetration of the Spanish *conquistador* was deeper than that

* A paper read at the Eighth National Convention of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, January 1964.

of the Dutch merchant to the south, or of the Englishman to the west, and out of this process began to appear a new nation, that of the lowland Christian Filipino. By the time of the revolt against Spain the marks of a new nation were evident: the Philippines had a common faith, a pattern of family and community life that was deeply influenced by his faith and by the political structure brought by the Spaniards, and an *ilustrado* class that spoke a common language, Spanish, had studied in the schools of Manila and Spain, and over the years had developed aspirations of national scope that were communicated to the lower classes. No longer were there to be minor local uprisings, but rather revolutions on a national scale. There were also the beginnings of a national literature in Spanish.

Yet in this new-found unity one discerns glaring strains of diversity. In the first place large fringes of the archipelago remained untouched even by Spanish influence, and continued to be Muslim or pagan. The common Spanish language was the language only of the *ilustrado*. The Tagalogs still spoke Tagalog, the Cebuanos spoke Cebuano, and both languages were as unintelligible to the Ilongo as his language was to them. Finally the urbanized *ilustrado*, a product of the Spanish schools, was in many ways closer to the Spaniard than to his own Filipino brother, and this affinity to the Spaniard was a status symbol in urban society.

When the Americans arrived as conquerors they found the kind of westernization stamped by the Spaniards on Philippine society rather unsatisfactory, and decided to re-do the whole thing in the image of the American and with thoroughgoing American efficiency. English supplanted Spanish in the schools. Protestant ministers undertook to re-evangelize the Filipinos. The educational system was expanded and completely revised to conform to American ideas of democratic education, political institutions were transplanted from the American Republic, and in one generation, jazz, basketball and cigarette smoking had become the order of the day. The Americans pushed the process of effective colonization to the geographical limits of the Philippines and in one degree or another brought within

the same general cultural orbit of the new American Philippines most of the groups which Spain could not subdue or influence.

Then came the War, which brought hundreds of thousands of Americans to the Philippines, and after it the tremendous growth of communication media. Increased incomes and the multiplicity of travel and scholarship grants brought thousands of Filipinos into direct contact with Western culture and they returned to the Philippines with new ideas of how to work and recreate.

Today, therefore, the Filipino emerges as the product of many cultural influences; among them, the original Malay which had become differentiated into many cultural and sub-cultural groups by the time the Spaniards arrived, the Spanish, and finally, the American influence. The impact of these varying influences assimilated in different degrees has made it difficult for the Filipino to achieve a sense of national identity. As a consequence the Filipino today suffers from a form of cultural schizophrenia. He is basically a Malay, yet he is in a state of restlessness and lack of direction brought about by the conflicting pressures of his Malay, Hispanic and American orientations.

We have seen what we might call the "cultural structure" of the Philippines. Let us list down the resulting problems, and work out some of the approaches to a solution of these problems.

We might say that the first aspect of the cultural problem is that of objectives. Towards what shall we be educating? What kind of men and women should we try to form? Can we think of a single ideal-type Filipino that all schools all over the Philippines should be trying to produce? Are we to set one cultural objective that must be considered as valid by all schools from Manila to Dankagan? Shall we try to teach the same subjects, in the same manner, and try to attain the same goals at each of the grades of the academic ladder? Or should we recognize from the outset the diversity of cultural types and levels in the Philippines and set our aims accordingly? Train Manila boys to be cosmopolitan, and provincial boys to be rural?

A secondary problem is that of means, principally the language that is to be the medium of instruction. Shall we hold on tenaciously to English as the medium; shall we go with the current and accept the fact that more and more one of our Filipino languages must be the medium; or shall we even go further and *actively hasten* the use of Tagalog or one of our native languages as the means of classroom communication?

We must remember, however, that the medium of instruction is not *merely* a language. In a sense it is a *total culture* that acts as a medium, for we do not merely instruct, we *educate*. Thus, if we use English as a medium of instruction, we have no choice but to teach English (and American) literature as well. If we teach English and American literature and expect students to understand this literature, then we have to give them the cultural setting of this literature. Not only does the English language become the medium of *instruction*, but the English-American culture becomes the *humanizing* medium for our students. Is this permanently desirable or shall we endeavor to extricate ourselves from such a situation?

Perhaps we can ask further whether English (language and culture) is for Filipinos a truly effective humanizing medium.

Let us now attempt some answers.

I think it will not be disputed by anyone that unity or a oneness of culture *is* a desirable ideal.

I would say that we would have this unity or oneness of culture if effectively over the entire country we were to have a *truly common language*, so that *substantially* over all the geographical area of the country and at all social and cultural levels, a single medium of communication were effective—so that one could expect that no matter where he might be in the country, whether in some remote barrio or in an office in Makati, one would be fairly sure that the use of this one language would assure one of truly effective communication. It would not be enough that this language should be some market place *patois* or *chabacano*, used for the bare essentials of human communication; it should be an instrument equally effective and equally familiar for the small talk of the home as well as for the precise language of a court battle or a business contract.

Unity of culture moreover would call for the common possession of a body of ideals and values, of traditions and customs that would be harmonious and consistent as a system, and effective in the world in which we live.

I do not think anyone can very well propose that we do nothing to achieve this cultural unity that is so desirable. The important thing is to determine *what* to do. And so perhaps it is good to know what cannot be done, what can be done, and finally what should be done.

The acculturation process is a long continuing one. We should begin, therefore, with the realization that, our cultural unity will not be achieved in a few short years.

We should also remember that culture cannot be legislated. Culture can be and will be influenced by laws, but strangely enough the influence need not be in the direction which the intent of the law would seem to indicate. Thus Prohibition in the United States increased rather than decreased drinking, and there is no guarantee that the Spanish Law will effectively salvage the Spanish language for our country; and although there is no question that Tagalog is more generally accepted today than ten years ago, we cannot be certain that this is because it was legislated as the basis for the national language. Culture is part of the soul of a people. It is not only a matter of conscious acceptance. Much of the process goes on subconsciously and even unconsciously, but laws do not guarantee its acceptance.

In the same manner we should give up any idea that five wise men can sit on a committee, decide what cultural traits a country shall have or shall not have, and make their decision stick. Five wise men, however, by their deeds and their writings, if these are quite forceful, might very effectively give direction to culture change.

It follows also that a unified or homogeneous culture is not formed by a process of "purification" or denial. What is cannot be denied out of existence. We must use it as our starting point. Culture is ever in the process of development and the next stage and the stage after that must take off from

the present one, which in turn came from many preceding stages.

What then can be done about a culture? Two things: (1) One can build on what it already is. Encourage the growth of what is good in it. Discourage what is bad. (2) One can exert an influence on it, by outside contact, (English, Spanish, Latin), by one's daily choices (like reading a book rather than watching a television play, going to a basketball game rather than to a cockfight, bringing a case to court rather than shooting an offending party), by production of all kinds, economic, artistic, and philosophic.

Let us now ask ourselves what the schools can and should do.

I would say that our work would be simply that of *cultural affirmation*. What do I mean by this? We have to do what the Spaniards failed to do, and what early American colonizers refused to do; and we must resist what some elements in the Philippines today seem to want to do.

In effect: the Spaniards failed to recognize the culture that was in the Philippines at the time of their arrival. The Filipinos with whom the Spaniards came in contact were a literate people. How much of a literature they had accumulated, in poetry and in song, we now do not quite know. In recent years we have found some of the ancient songs of the mountain people still preserved. Surely the lowland Filipinos had something at least equivalent if not superior. Although the Spaniards preserved the languages of the people as an abstract form of communication, they did not preserve the literature and the arts that went with that language. The schools that the Spaniards organized were basically for Spanish boys and naturally were institutions for the transmission of Spanish culture. When Filipinos later on were allowed to study in these schools the natural result was separation from their own culture, with the resulting cleavage we spoke of above.

The Americans did something similar and perhaps less pardonable. At the turn of the century when they took the Philippines there certainly was in this country a very recognizable,

if incipient, Filipino literature in Spanish, and a Filipino art. This was, after four centuries, our heritage; and I believe it is possible to show that as a body of literature, it is superior to what we now term as Filipino literature in English. Yet the American-inspired school of the 20th century refused to honor this small heritage, all the more precious because limited, and launched off into something entirely new. They started us off again on something else—the American way.

For what the Spaniards and the Americans gave us we are not the losers, we are the gainers. But we certainly were the losers in what they did not preserve for us. I think it is the role of our Catholic schools today to reaffirm *all* that is in our culture, to search out and restore all that we can of the Malay, the early Christian Filipino, and the Spanish Filipino elements that are in our culture, and to put our students into thoughtful, appreciative and yet respectfully critical contact with them. It is important for us today to come in contact with the influences that formed our fathers, for it is only if we come to grips with these cultural influences that we will really understand what made us, and therefore what we are today.

I think therefore that it is one of the major roles of our schools today to engage in this very important work of cultural restoration in all its forms, historical, literary and artistic; to give to our young people a sense of their origins and what they truly are.

Let me say at this point that I am one hundred percent against the Spanish Law, and yet I am one hundred percent in favor of very effective Spanish departments in all our colleges, and I assert that I am not inconsistent. I am against the Spanish Law because I know how hopeless it is to legislate back into existence a part of our culture. I am in favor of Spanish because such a fine part of our heritage and culture is enshrined in it. The Filipino who will deny that part of Filipino culture which has been preserved in the Spanish medium is denying part of himself.

On the other hand I do not think that today we can afford to undo our American and Anglo-Saxon connections. That in-

deed would be folly and cultural suicide. We speak and write English, we argue in it, we even pray in it. It has become an essential part of those of us who have had our education in schools. Let us not deny this part of us either, but preserve and if possible enlarge it. What we cannot do is to proceed blindly and uncritically in sole pursuit of a culture that clearly has no roots in our country, and to the exclusion of what is truly ours, all because we have the language medium for it.

I seem to advocate a rather difficult doctrine—the cultivation of at least three language media in our schools, Filipino, Spanish and English. But I do not see any other remedy. It is our fortune and our misfortune that we have been influenced by these diverse cultures. If we deny one of these influences we are denying a good part of ourselves.

But what good would be derived from this process of cultural affirmation and restoration? In the first place we lay claim to all that we are. We teach the student to love and take pride in all that is worthy in his culture. This alone would have a tremendous effect on all of our young people. From the most elementary psychology we know how many personality difficulties flow from not having a sense of one's worth. It is only the person who is sure of his personal qualities, and who realizes that they are God-given, that can be truly humble. What is true of the individual is true of a people. Only when we begin to really appreciate what is beautiful in our own culture and the contributions others have made to that culture will we emerge a truly mature and responsible people. As long as we do not understand and appreciate ourselves and the process by which cultural change does take place, we will be adopting foreign traits and ways in something close to blind adulation, and at the same time reproaching ourselves for doing such a thing and resenting the foreign influences that seem to impose themselves on our own culture.

I do not think there has ever been anything more pernicious in our Philippine society than the weakness we seem to have of indiscriminate aping of all we see in foreign cultures. But with the kind of education we have been getting, something like this was bound to happen. Truth and beauty are of course

universal, in the sense that no matter what external forms these may take they are recognizable by the person who truly understands the medium. Yet truth and beauty are not presented to us in abstractions and generalities. Literature especially points out to us this particular piece of truth, of goodness or of beauty. What happens then when a group of young people get for their contact with beauty an exclusive fare of foreign literary works? Day after day what is shown to them is something good or beautiful in the United States, England, Canada and so on. The literature that they read never opens for them, never interprets nor idealizes for them the beauties in their midst. Can we help it if after a while these young people get conditioned to an unreflecting attitude that what is worthwhile cannot be something that is actually home-grown and local?

A second effect of the divorce between our living world and our world of books is unthinking nominalism. If I keep reading about daffodils, maple trees and autumn leaves, and I cannot refer these back to reality, they never become part of *my* reality. Then I get used to taking words not as symbols of reality but simply as stimuli. "Daffodil" is not something beautiful I have experienced. It is rather something I have been taught to respond to as beautiful. That is all.

Once the young mind is conditioned to accepting words merely as signals, we have set the stage for book learning of the worst kind, for now the young mind takes books as the objects, not the *means* to knowledge. Once that happens we reduce education to a memory process instead of a thought process, and we prepare people to accept rather than create.

If our schools will only make the break, and go back to the living realities and to the culture of our people, these evils would gradually be corrected.

The process of cultural affirmation we have described is also the only way by which the school-going elite can be brought back to close contact with their people. Since we cannot lift the mass of the people to the cultural levels of the elite, at least we can so educate the elite that they are not ignorant of the

simple yet very genuine culture of their own people. We will then have achieved some measure of the cultural unity we are looking for.

The full effect of this process of cultural affirmation will really come one or two generations later. Then something new will blossom and come to full flower. It will be a synthesis and a harmonizing of the influences that for centuries have played discordant effects upon the Filipino. First one, then another, then a third, then twenty, then a hundred writers, thinkers, artists will appear producing something that will not be borrowed, but will spring from the native soil, enriched by Latin, Anglo-Saxon and perhaps other European and Asian cultures. And this will be Filipino.

I do not know what language or art forms those men or women of the future will use. By then perhaps the schools all over the country may have so improved, and contact with America and the West may be so close, that English may yet emerge as the dominant tongue. It is not impossible. But if we have taken the trouble of affirming all of our culture it will be English that will be deeply steeped in the realities of Filipino life and thought. Or the language may be Tagalog with the measured flow of the river that flows from Laguna and the tang of the bay that borders on the original Tagalog lands; but it will be a Tagalog honed to the precise sharpness of modern life, lighter, richer, more sprightly. As Latin helped to discipline the tongues of Europe, and as French polished Anglo-Saxon into a medium worthy of Chaucer and Shakespeare, so too can Spanish, English and Tagalog taught to the same classes in our high schools and colleges produce a linguistic medium that someday will reach new literary heights. This is but history, and history sometimes repeats itself. When this happens we shall have a new nation, truly one.

It may seem to the listener that thus far I have skirted all practical problems involved in this operation. Indeed I have.

The first one of course is the matter of language. Our students are floundering in one language, and here we are

advocating the full development of three languages. At the beginning of the century Ateneo de Manila students were doing Spanish, English, Latin and Greek. We really face a problem of bad teaching, not of multiplicity of languages. With bad teaching not even one language will be learned.

On the other hand there is no better way of handling the teaching of grammar than for one single instructor to show the differences between languages. For example much of the difficulty Filipinos have in English is centered on the use of the tenses and prepositions. The reason for this is obvious. There are no tenses (strictly such) in the Filipino languages, and in them the prepositional function is preferably shifted to the verb. It would help very much in our teaching of English if the instructor were aware of these things and in turn pointed them out to his pupils.

I realize moreover that to expect the majority of our schools to be carrying out the program I described on a high level would be quite unrealistic. But in education first we set ideals then we push towards them, the better schools taking the lead and helping those less favored with personnel and other resources. Even if only five or six of our schools were to push this program to respectable levels, much would be achieved in the course of time.

It is quite clear too that not all the aspects of the three cultural influences that play upon us are healthy. Does the idea of cultural affirmation therefore mean that all cultural traits we have acquired in the course of time should be affirmed, no matter whether they are good or bad? Does it mean that we should not try to shed them even if undesirable? Moreover what should be done about conflicting cultural traits? Traditionally, the Filipino is supposed to be subjective and personal, making his decisions and choices on the basis of personalities, while the modern American influence on him is to adopt more objective and impersonal attitudes and values, so as to be influenced less by personalities and more by objective situations.

These two problems have a common solution. An undesirable cultural trait is always going to be the exaggeration of something good. Human sacrifice for example was a distortion and a corruption of a basic religious impulse, resulting from misconceptions of God. Conflicting cultural traits are also varying positions on the same cultural continuum. One can as easily be excessively personal as well as excessively impersonal. The point is to be excessive in neither direction.

We can only affirm that which is positive in our culture. What is evil, what is a deprivation, an exaggeration, a corruption we cannot affirm. But how do we identify what is exaggerated and corrupt? For this there is nothing better than Christian prudence. Christianity is essentially human, in the sense that Christianity as such will always bring out the best in human nature. As our Catholic schools stress truly Christian values they cannot help but furnish the norms that will guide our younger generations in the choice and the moderation of the cultural traits they will accept.

It is for this reason that Catholic schools have a responsibility beyond that of other schools to be in the front ranks and to lead in the formation of a Christian Filipino culture.