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One Hundred Years of the Ateneo de Manila

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One Hundred Years of the Ateneo de Manila

His Excellency
CARLOS P. GARCIA
President of the Philippines

WHEN I was invited to take part in the program on this occasion, I gladly accepted because it affords me the pleasure and the honor to congratulate this year's graduates of the different colleges of the Ateneo and to wish each and all of you full measure of success in life. I also came to participate in the celebration of the first centennial of the founding of this great institution.

If we take into account the fact that the Ateneo has won distinction as the cradle of modern Philippine nationalism and the fact that the greatest leaders in the epic struggle for our national redemption and freedom bore the signet of Atenean education, we can truthfully say that this celebration is an historical event of profound national significance.

THE CRADLE OF NATIONALISM

Indeed the name of the Ateneo de Manila is writ large on the pages of the modern history of the Philippines. The pens that first pricked the conscience of Spain; the life offered at the altar of supreme sacrifice that the Filipino Nation might come to life; the leaders of the Revolution of 1896 who sat in the high councils of the First Republic and were among its generals and soldiers in the field; those that swelled the ranks

of Nacionalistas led by the triumvirate of Osmeña-Quezon-Palma that spearheaded the struggle for independence through peaceful means in the early days of the American regime; those who penned the Constitution of Malolos and he who presided over the writing of the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines—they were all bright stars in the constellation of illustrious Ateneans.

In the sombre and sanguinary trials of war and enemy occupation, Ateneans served our people in the light of their own convictions, some by ensuring national survival, others by braving the torture chamber and the executioner's sword with the gay gallantry of Edmund Campion. Today Ateneans are in Congress, in the Cabinet, in the judiciary, in foreign service, in art, science and business—all contributors to the glory, prosperity and happiness of this nation.

God in His infinite wisdom has allotted to the Ateneo the destiny of being the nursery of Philippine nationalism. That the Spanish Jesuits should have contributed so greatly to the development of Philippine nationalism is in line with the logic of events. Because our historians tell us that when the Spanish Jesuits were allowed to return to the Philippines, they were then given by royal decree the missions in Mindanao which had formerly been under their administration, and that the Recollect friars were compensated for the loss with the parishes around Manila which were administered by the Filipino clergy. It was in defense of the rights of the Filipino priests, and of their dignity which had been meanly attacked to excuse spoliation, that the great Father Pedro Pelaez petitioned the Spanish throne for the revocation of the decree, and awakened the Filipino priests, and with them all the Filipinos, to that consciousness of themselves as a nation and of their rights in their own country, that was to lead José Burgos and José Rizal to the scaffold of martyrdom in their time, and our own generation to the testing time of sovereignty and independence.

A REVERSAL OF HISTORY

I have sometimes wondered if the Spanish Jesuits who founded the Ateneo Municipal foresaw the result of their la-

bours. It is another historical irony, for example, that the Jesuits have trained their own best enemies, from Voltaire and Rizal to our time. But surely it is of some significance that, while the European Revolutions from 1848 to 1931 demanded the expulsion of the Jesuits, even after the papal rehabilitation, four times from France, five times from Spain, and once or twice again from Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Italy, Germany and Portugal, the Philippine Revolution's cry for the expulsion of the Spanish religious Orders was not in fact directed against the mentors of Rizal.

I am convinced that the reason for this curious reversal in the Philippines of a general trend in the Catholic world was that, in the Ateneo Municipal, the Spanish Jesuits encouraged and satisfied the unquenchable thirst of the emergent Filipino Nation for an equal opportunity, without racial discrimination or obscurantist prejudice, for knowledge and progress. It is interesting to remember that one of the causes for the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Bourbon kingdoms was their alleged "ultramontane" attitude, that is to say, their subordination of nationalist interests to the international supremacy of the Holy See. How odd, then, that in the Philippines their own school, the Ateneo Municipal, should have been the seed-bed of Philippine nationalism: And yet not so odd, because the nationalism which they eschewed was Spanish nationalism, not Filipino nationalism, and the Spanish Jesuits, if they were bad Spaniards, were after all good teachers. They taught Rizal and his generation that Filipinos and Spaniards were equal; that application, resourcefulness and natural talent, irrespective of name or colour or wealth, were titles to reward; and, above all, that knowledge was an end desirable in itself and open for all.

RIZAL AND THE ATENEO

No Filipino can understand how unattainable and yet how fascinating these concepts were to the generation of Rizal without reading the *Filibusterismo*. Rizal, the social historian, describing the students of his Manila days crossing the Pasig on their way to school, singles out a distinctive group. "They

walked briskly, loaded with books and notebooks, their minds turning over worriedly the subjects assigned for recitation and for homework—they were,” says Rizal, “students of the Ateneo.” One of these students is Basilio, the surviving son of the madwoman Sisa, who has been taken under the protection of Capitan Tiago. Basilio has been studying in another school but Capitan Tiago, whose daughter Maria Clara has just become a nun against his wishes, indulges his prejudice against the friars by transferring his protégé to the Jesuit school, the Ateneo Municipal. Here, writes Rizal, Basilio “found a system of instruction that he had never believed existed, and a new world opened before his eyes. Apart from certain superfluities and puerilities, the method followed in the Ateneo filled him with admiration; and the zeal of the professors, with gratitude.”

We must, of course, make allowances for Rizal's loyalties to his old school. To praise one's professors is a subtle form of self-flattery. But the testimony of those who studied under the Spanish Jesuits is corroborated by the historical evidence of their achievements, and it cannot be gainsaid that the old Ateneo Municipal was a tremendous liberating force for the energies and self-confidence of the developing Filipino Nation.

THE AMERICAN JESUITS

The American Jesuits who replaced the Spaniards in 1921 had a less spectacular but equally important mission to perform. To the fresh generations of Filipinos growing up under the American system of separation between Church and State, the Ateneo de Manila, as it came to be called, proved that the classic disciplines of the *Ratio Studiorum* could produce scholars that were the match of the products of the new public schools and lay universities; and that the traditional virtues founded on the true Faith were still the best safeguards of a Nation facing the temptations inherent in political self-government, economic freedom, and social change. We lack the perspective now to make any final judgments on the educational work of the American Jesuits in the Philippines, but the record of their graduates in our present day suffices to give the assurance that the spirit of the old Ateneo Municipal survived

the change of climate from the old Walled City to Padre Faura and now to Loyola Heights.

But even as I speak of Ateneo's glorious past I seem to envision its grandiose future. For this future—for, we might say, the next hundred years of the Ateneo—I hazard two important roles within the general compass of education. One is national; the other, international; but both, I suggest, are in the great tradition of the Society of Jesus.

AN INTERNATIONAL MISSION

Recall with me, if you will, the earliest days of the Society. Recall Ignatius of Loyola and six companions vowing to make their first adventure a pilgrimage to those Holy Places in Asia where the Son of God chose to become man. Recall Francis Xavier dying off the coast of China, consumed with the fever of his saintly ambition to storm the fortress of Japan. Recall Robert de Nobili who became a Brahmin and accepted the caste system and the veneration of ancestors the better to reach the heart of India. Recall Mateo Ricci, who called himself Li Ma-tou, studying the Nine Classics of China to win the cap and robes of a mandarin, and debating astronomy with the eunuchs of the Forbidden City, in an effort to convert the millions of China through the Son of Heaven. Recall, in a word, the special devotion of the Society to the peoples of Asia.

Now, race, geography, and our common condition as new and developing countries, impel the Filipino Nation more and more toward a closer community with other Asians. Already Ateneans were among the first to proclaim with me a new Asia policy for the Philippines, and Ateneans have embarked on experiments of humanitarian aid or culture cooperation with our neighbors. But cooperation must work both ways; we cannot expect others to understand us if we do not, in our turn, try to understand them. It seems to me that the Ateneo de Manila, under the guidance of its Jesuit community, has a duty and a mission, sanctioned by tradition, to contribute to this momentous undertaking; and that, secure in its unique command of classic western philosophies, both Greek and scholas-

tic, it is in a perfect position to interpret Asia and the West to one another.

You have already given sanctuary to the Chinese Jesuits, persecuted by the Communist tyranny of Peking. Give a home in the Philippines also to the ancient cultures and philosophies of Asia, and send forth in return the principles and doctrines of a Christian democracy. I see in the Ateneo de Manila of the next hundred years an Academy of Asia, where Aristotle and Plato may converse with the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, and the lofty austerities of Aquinas may be warmed by the humility and loving kindness of Gandhiji.

A NATIONAL MISSION

In the national field, it also seems to me that the Ateneo de Manila has another traditional mission to renew, one particularly called for by the necessities of our age. The Sputnik and now the Lunik have unveiled the advantages, perhaps temporary, that Soviet scientists have gained from an intensive emphasis on scientific education. Throughout the free world the call has gone to match this progress in science, both pure and applied. Our own government has initiated a re-examination of the curriculum of our schools. Of course, we Filipinos have neither the money nor the technical training, and in fact we have neither the strategic duty nor reasons of prestige, to launch solar satellites or manufacture nuclear weapons. But science also has its gifts for peace, and specially gifts for emergent and developing countries like ours. It can teach us to grow more and better food, to exploit our mineral resources, to make the many things that a modern civilization requires for the progress and prosperity of the people. What the Soviets have accomplished in the field of scientific education, raising a population that was largely composed of illiterate peasants only one or two generations ago to a level that has produced some of the world's greatest scientists, is a challenge to our system of free education.

The scientific tradition of Ateneo qualifies her to lead in answering that challenge. In this connection, Ateneo can derive inspiration in recalling that she produced the first Fili-

pino botanist (Leon Ma. Guerrero) and the most eminent chemist of his day (Anacleto del Rosario); that she produced the Ateneo Museum, now vanished, whose display of Philippine natural science was known throughout the world; that she established the close community of scholars and scientists that existed when the classics were taught in the Ateneo in the brotherly shade of the great Observatory of Padre Faura and Padre Algué.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

The Society of Jesus has had its doctors, preachers and historians: Suárez, Vásquez, Molina, Ripalda, and St. Robert Bellarmine; the eloquent Segneri, the historians Mariana and Pallavicini. But it has also had its scientists: astronomers of the first rank, like the Italian Secchi, the German Hagen, the English Perry, and Padre Algué himself; physicists like Teodor Wulf, psychologists like Lindworsky and Marechal, biologists like Erich Wasmann. These men have proved that there is no conflict between science and religion, between faith and reason; and they and the very history of the Society of Jesus should give us reason to hope that the Ateneo de Manila will once again assume the leadership in Philippine education in science.

I dare to see in the Ateneo de Manila of the next hundred years an Academy of Science side by side with the Academy of Asia, a centre of pure science and experimental research, endowed perhaps by its prosperous alumni, and attracting more and more of our youth from the exercises of forensic eloquence and athletic skill to the stricter but more useful scientific disciplines. I hope to see a new and greater scientific Museum take its place beside the Gymnasium, and the Chapel surrounded and supported by great laboratories where man may approach God through the mysteries of creation.

The Ateneo and the Jesuits have dedicated themselves to the greater glory of God: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* is their traditional battlecry. But God can be glorified in ways as manifold as the world He made and as innumerable as His crea-

tures. He can be glorified, as Ateneans have glorified Him in the past, through the sacrifice of self for the love of country, the preaching of His Holy Word, and the example of natural and civic virtue. He can also be glorified, as Ateneans may glorify him in the future, through the cultivation of understanding among nations and the love of one's neighbor, or through the study of the laws that God made for the created Universe. Man finds infinity in the nucleus of the atom, and, probing with his missiles the far reaches of outer space, finds the star that shone over Bethlehem.

In conclusion, Most Reverend Fathers and gentlemen, may I express the hope and the wish that the next hundred years of the Ateneo de Manila will be even more glorious than the first, and of even greater service to the Nation, to humanity, and to God.¹

¹ The above address was delivered at the Commencement Exercises at Loyola Heights, Q.C. on 15 March 1959.