

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Federation of Free Farmers

L. A. C.

Philippine Studies vol. 2, no. 2 (1954): 171–174

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

the only goal which will ever fully satisfy their desires, the vision of God face to face for all eternity.

There are a number of tidy little maxims and proverbs which—to hear some people tell it—would seem to provide the key to a happy and secure life. Such for example is the orthodox version of the proverb, “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” Some other examples are: “Honesty is the best policy”—“Prudence is the better part of valor”—“Make haste slowly”—“A penny saved is a penny earned”—“A rolling stone gathers no moss”—etc., etc.

Of course, such maxims are not bad. They are good—as far as they go. But they contain only half-truths. They are cold, they don’t inspire, they don’t give the young man visions and ideals. They might help a man to earn a little money, and they certainly will enable him to hold on to his money once he has earned it. But these maxims, of themselves, will never lead to real happiness. They are not the slogans of young men nor of older men whose hearts are young.

The true Liberal Education will give a set of principles by which a man can really *live* and gave him visions of intangible things worth fighting and even dying for. The “bird in the bush,” for the product of such an education, will be a real ideal always leading him forward. He will live according to the maxim of St. Augustine: “Thou hast created us for Thyself, O God, and our heart knows no rest until it may repose in Thee.”

J. J. M.

Federation of Free Farmers

The *First Report of the Federation of Free Farmers* is a document which all who are concerned with a Christian solution of our social problem will read with intense interest. The *Report* tells the history of this movement from the time when Jeremias U. Montemayor went to the Barrio of Bisocol in Alaminos, Pangasinan, and conceived the idea of uniting the farmers of the barrio in a cooperative effort to solve their ,

problems. The story of this courageous departure has been told by Mr. Montemayor in *Plows and Peace* which appeared serially in *The Manila Times* and is attached as an annex to the *Report*. Himself of Alaminos *hacendero* antecedents, Mr. Montemayor encountered the natural suspicions of the farmers until he was able to induce Father Walter B. Hogan to visit the barrio, and by his visit to convince the people that Mr. Montemayor's proposal was inspired only by good will towards them.

This was not yet the Federation of Free Farmers, but it contained the two key ideas of the later organization: physical and moral strength through unity; spiritual sanity through religious motivation.

The Federation came into existence as a logical child of the Bisocol experiment. On October 25, 1953 it opened its first office, that of Central Luzon in San Fernando, Pampanga. Its purpose is, through organization of the farmer, to enable him to improve his lot—his material lot first, and from this his spiritual lot. The *Report*—repeating an earlier *Manifesto*—outlined the objectives as long range: land ownership and increased production; and immediate: legal and other services in tenancy cases, dissemination of legal and other information, channeling government and other civic aid to really poor farmers, establishing or improving home industries, etc.

But throughout, the truth is insisted on that these objectives, long range and immediate, are not ultimates. Father Pacifico Ortiz, S.J., is the first National Adviser, and for the moment is finding the funds.

No one who reads the *Report* can fail to be impressed by the Federation's high level of approach. There is no name-calling, so common in social documents. The needs of the farmer are exposed in calm, objective language. The purposes of the organization are proposed simply. The emphasis on conciliation is a fruit of its Christian principles and a guarantee against what a French writer has called *ouvrierisme*, "work-erism," which has given a bad name to workers' movements in some places by its confident assumption that there can be only one side to any given social issue.

Most interesting are the concrete results. If one considers that this organization is less than a year old, these results are truly impressive. The report lists them as "Accomplishments and Activities." These include 42 reconciliations (listed first because first in the Federation's desires!); 18 legal cases handled and innumerable legal opinions given, all free; 26 representations of miscellaneous character in which the Federation acted in one role or another to promote the farmers' interests.

In addition legislation has been scrutinized, Federation centers established, lectures given, useful literature (on subjects as varied as tenancy and *talapia*) distributed, and various other projects inaugurated or planned. Important among the last is a dialect newspaper, certainly an ambitious undertaking, but one that will prove the Federation's most powerful instrument, if it can be successfully maintained. And these young men have a way of making things succeed. Like the GI repair shop's announcement during the liberation, their motto seems to be: "The impossible done immediately; miracles take a little longer."

The Federation received much favorable publicity in the middle of May of this year, when it was able to negotiate a very satisfactory contract between 3,000 tenants and 150 landlords in and around Concepcion, Tarlac. *The Sunday Times* for May 16, 1954 commented on this contract as follows:

Apart from its significance as a document which improves upon existing laws governing landlord-tenant relationships, the tenancy accord which was formally concluded the other day between Tarlac landowners and farm workers seems specially historic in that it marks the revival of the legitimate agrarian union under responsible, rather than radical, leadership. . . . The new tenancy accord has been made possible by the fact that the farmers were able to organize under responsible leadership, and sign a contract governing relationships on the cultivation of 8,000 hectares of land. That is quite an achievement when it is viewed against the generally suspicious attitude of law-enforcement authorities towards agrarian unions.

It is generally admitted that the Tarlac tenancy contract will set the pattern for central Luzon. Such a development would naturally be significant in the peace and order situation in this critical area.

The *Report* carries many "annexes." The Federation wants everyone to know where its money is going (the little there is of it!) and therefore attaches a detailed financial statement. It has also a list of members, almost 4,200. The spiritual advisers, in addition to Father Ortiz, are Fathers Basilio David and Norberto Coronel of the San Fernando Diocese, and Fathers José de Haes, Raphael van Nieuwenhove and Herman Martens of the "Belgian Fathers."

The assistance of these men is rightly stressed in the *Report*. First of all they have a certain sales value. The farmers are not likely to think that the priest is trying to sell them a gold brick, and the landlord will feel pretty sure that the Federation is not Communist inspired. But this sales value is only a consequence and outward manifestation of their real worth to the Federation, namely in "maintaining" as the *Report* says, "the purity of the organization, promoting the spiritual welfare of the members, choosing the best local leaders, raising funds, convincing landlords, etc."

In other words the Federation depends on its ideals for its success, and on these advisers to help preserve these ideals. Without the ideals the Federation is just another movement of self-interest, which can easily deteriorate into selfish interest. The freedom of the Free Farmers is a freedom that could easily degenerate into a new slavery, if those ideals are lost. Hence the wisdom of Mr. Montemayor and his associates in stressing this element.

Those who wish to know more about the Federation or to swell its slim financial resources can find it at the Ateneo compound on Padre Faura, Manila.

L.A.C.

Social Service Conferences

The Eighth Catholic International Conference of Social Service, meeting this year in Cologne, directed its attention to the "Human Person and Social Service in the Modern World." This theme was based on respect for the dignity and the freedom of the human person and the need to ensure their recognition in a changing world.