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Tomas Confesor's Letter to Fermin Caram

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.



During the dark days of the Philippines under Japanese rule, Senator Tomas Confesor wrote a letter which was secretly spread around and inspired many guerrilla fighters and prisoners of war. Published years later in 1957 in the Manila daily, *The Manila Times*, it still continues to inspire many of its readers.

The letter was occasioned by a plea of Governor Felipe Caram of Iloilo Province to accept Japanese rule, come down from the hills with his guerrillas and forego resistance to the invader. This, the governor promised, would bring "peace and tranquillity to the suffering people of Panay." Confesor refused. He survived the war and died only in 1957.

This copy of the letter is from a newsclipping made by Fr. John F. Hurley, S.J. who noted: "Famous patriotic letter of *Tomas Confesor* written in the mountains of Panay Island and proving a magnificent example of *devotion to high principles*. This was circulated surreptitiously during the Occupation. I read it then and was thrilled and inspired and encouraged. *Requiescat in Pace*. (Sgd.) J. F. Hurley, S.J."

United States of America
Commonwealth of the Philippines
Office of the Governor

Panay, 20 February 1943

My dear Doctor,

I am happy to acknowledge receipt of your letter of January 14 last, signed at the same time by former General Quimbo, Senator Veloso and Captain Tando. I regret very much that your letter reached me more than a month after it was written despite the fact that the party to whom it was handed was just living across the river from my place on the other side of the hill. Had I received it earlier, I would have been only too glad to meet my friends, Quimbo, Veloso and TAANDO [sic]. I

would have had no objection to the pleasure of the acquaintance of Colonel Furukawa. He came on a mission of peace and I would have taken advantage of his presence to present him my views on the subject. I regret much, therefore, not to have met him. Nevertheless, I hope that he and his companions had a good time while they were in our province. I wonder how successful they have been with their mission.

I felt flattered indeed by your statement that should I return to the city I would bring relief, peace and tranquillity to our people in Panay. I wish to state with all frankness that peace and tranquillity in our country, specially in Panay, do not in the slightest degree depend on me nor upon the Filipino people, for as long as America and Japan and their respective allies are at war with one another, peace and tranquillity will never be obtained in our country nor in Panay. There is a total war in which the issue between the warring parties are less concerned with the territorial question but more with the forms of government, ways of life, and those that affect even the very thoughts, feelings and sentiments of every man. In other words, the question at stake with regard to the Philippines is not whether Japan or the United States should possess it, but more fundamentally, it is: —What system of government should stand here and what ways of life, system of social organization and code of morals should govern our existence? As long, therefore, as America and Japan remain at war, these fundamental questions will remain unsettled. Consequently, peace and tranquillity will not reign in Panay, much less in the Philippines.

Despite this fact, however, there is a means to bring about peace, even under the present circumstances if Japan is really sincere in her desire to see peace and tranquillity here. To this effect, she should declare the Philippines free and independent, proclaiming at the same time our neutrality. To further demonstrate her sincerity of purpose to this end, she should evacuate all of her forces, military establishments, and other governmental organizations from the Islands with the guarantee that she should not land forces therein nor within her territorial waters. I am sure that should Japan declare this proposition and formally present it to the United States, the latter would be compelled to accept it. Her sense of honor would give her no other alternative but to back up Japan in this regard. You must already be aware that the Allies of America have signed a treaty with China lifting their extra-territorial rights whereby their citizens within Chinese jurisdiction upon committing any offense or crime will have to be tried before Chinese courts under Chinese laws. Assuming that this proposition is acceptable to both Japan and America, we would then be free to establish and maintain our own system of government . . . convenient to us. In other words, we would enjoy real and true independence in the exercise of governmental powers and not one like that of Nanking

under Wang Ching-wei. Please present this to your friend, Colonel Furukawa, with the request that he submit this to superior authorities of the Imperial Government of Japan for consideration to put to a test the sincerity of Japan's desire to give us independence.

I have carefully read and studied the three conditions for accomplishment by the Filipinos to entitle us to our independence under Japanese promise. Let me tell you frankly that we will never be independent under such conditions because they are impossible to accomplish for at least a century. I entirely disagree with Mr. Vargas when he stated that the Japanese independence proposition is definite and clear while that of America is ambiguous. On the contrary, it is that of the Japanese [which] is nebulous, vague and indefinite. The terms and conditions in this regard are phrased in such manner that only puppets could understand them clearly, people who have no freedom to use their will and other mental faculties.

The burden of your so-called message to me consists of the entreaty that further bloodshed and destruction of property in Panay should stop and our people be saved from further sufferings and miseries resulting from warfare and hostilities now existing between Japan and ourselves. The responsibility however, of accomplishing this end does not rest upon us but entirely upon your friends who have sworn allegiance to Japan. For it was Japan that projected and created those conditions, Japan is the sole author of this holocaust in the Far East.

I agree with you when you say that our people are 'experiencing unspeakable hardships and suffering because of these hostilities,' but you should realize that our people are bearing those burdens cheerfully, because they know that they are doing it for a good and noble cause. They know why we are resisting Japan. They are aware that Japan is trying by force to make us accept her system of government and ways of life, which are unacceptable to us to say the least. You may not agree with me, but the truth is that the present war is a blessing in disguise to our people, and a test of our character. . . . In other words, this war has placed us in the crucible to assay the metal in our being. For as a people, we have been living during the last forty years under a regime of justice and liberty regulated only by universally accepted principles of constitutional government. We have come to enjoy personal privileges and civil liberties without much struggle, without undergoing any pain to attain them. They were practically a gift from a generous and magnanimous people—the people of the United States of America. Now that Japan is attempting to destroy these liberties should we not exert any effort to defend them? Should we not be willing to suffer for their defense? If our people are undergoing hardships now, we are doing it gladly, it is because we are will-

ing to pay the price for those constitutional liberties and privileges. You cannot become wealthy by honest means without sweating heavily. You very well know that the principles of democracies and democratic institutions were brought to life through bloodshed and fire. If we sincerely believe in those principles and institutions, as we who are resisting Japan do, we should contribute to the utmost of our capacity to the cost of its maintenance to save them from destruction and annihilation and such contribution should be in terms of painful sacrifices, the same currency that other people paid for those principles.

You were a member of the Constitutional Convention that adopted the Constitution of the Philippine Commonwealth. You did not only subscribe to it but you became a Filipino citizen by virtue thereof. Now that the hour of test has come how dare you advise the people, as you do now, to forego that sacred document and accept anything for peace and tranquillity. Should I hearken to you I would be conspiring with you and the Japanese military authorities to destroy the Constitution that you and I signed with all solemnity, and everything [for] which the Constitution stands. Do you not realize, therefore, that what you are doing now is a repudiation of your Filipino citizenship and all the sacred privileges attendant thereto, things which I am sure you hold dear and precious?

This is not enough. I firmly believe that it is not wise and statesmanly for our leaders, in this their darkest hour, to teach our people to avoid sufferings and hardships at the sacrifice of fundamental principles of government and the democratic way of life. On the contrary, it is their bounded [sic] duty and responsibility to inspire our people to willingly undergo any kind of difficulties and sacrifices for the sake of noble principles that they nourish deep in their hearts. Instead of depressing their patriotic ardor, the people should be inspired to be brave and courageous under all kinds of hardships and difficulties in defense of what they consider righteous and just. We shall never win nor deserve the esteem and respect of other nations if we lack principles, and if we do, we do not possess the courage and valor to defend those principles at any cost."

Undoubtedly if you and your fellow puppets are today receiving a certain degree of consideration from Japanese Army, such considerations may be attributed exclusively to the heroism of our soldier in Bataan and the demonstration of their readiness and willingness of our people to suffer, especially of the common man, not the rich, the learned, the ambitious and crooked politicians and office-seekers who are hungry for power and influence, nor to your personal qualities of wealth. You puppets love ease and comfort so much as to compel you to barter the liberties of our people for anything. You underrate the

nobility and grandeur of the character and soul of the Filipinos by such action. Such sentiment is terribly ignominious. You are besmirching to the maximum degree by it the character of our people.

America is at war with Japan, not because she wants to keep the Philippines but to uphold and maintain the principles of democracy therein. In the speeches of Japanese military authorities, specially that of General Homma, formerly commander-in-chief of the Japanese Imperial Forces in the Philippines, they condemn democracy and the principles of liberty under such a system of government. It is, therefore, evidently fallacious and insincere on your part to state that you are not pro-Japanese when you are exerting all efforts to bring about the surrender of the people of Panay. You declared that you are neither a pro-Japanese nor a pro-American but a pro-Filipino. What do you mean by being a pro-Filipino? What are the principles for which you stand as a pro-Filipino? What national objectives do you have in mind when you express the thoughts that you are a pro-Filipino and not a pro-Japanese nor a pro-American? What ideals do you propose to realize as a pro-Filipino? If you have any objective and ideals at all, do you believe in realizing them more effectively under a totalitarian and absolute system of government than under a democracy? Please make concrete specifications of your being a pro-Filipino as against being pro-Japanese or pro-American. In other words, on what concrete grounds does your pro-Filipinism rest?

You were decidedly wrong when you told me that there is no ignominy in surrender. That may be true in the case of the soldiers, who were corralled by the enemy, consisting of superior force with no way of escape whatever, for when they gave themselves up they did not repudiate any principle of government and the philosophy of life which inspired them to fight heroically and valiantly—to use your own words. Should I surrender, however, and with me the people, by your own invitations and assurances of guarantee to my life, my family and those who follow me, I would be surrendering something more precious than life itself: 'the principles of democracy and justice and the honor and dignity of the PEOPLE.'

I noted you emphasized in your letter only peace and tranquillity of our people. I do not know whether by omission or intentionally you failed to refer in any way to the honor and dignity of our race. You seem to have forgotten those noble sentiments already, despite the fact that Japan has hardly been a year in our country. It appears clearly evident, therefore, that there is a great difference between the manner you and we are trying to lead our people. You and your fellow puppets are trying to give them peace and tranquillity by destroying their honor and without suffering or if there is any, the least possible. On the other hand, we endeavor to inspire them to face difficulties and

undergo any sacrifice to uphold the noble principles of popular rule and constitutional government thereby holding up high and immaculate their honor and dignity at the same time. In other words, you are trying to drive our people to peace and tranquillity on the road of IGNOMINY, to borrow your own language. Peace and tranquillity are easy to achieve if you choose the easy way but in that case you would be living beneath the dignity of a human being. You would be reducing our people as a result thereof to the status of the dumb animal like the good carabao which lives in peace and tranquillity you are talking about—that of a carabao? Would this not be clearly ignominious? You also brought up the point that the Japanese are generous because they freed the Filipino soldiers whom they captured. In this connection, let me ask you this question: Is it not a fact that the former USAFFE men are now working as PC under the Japanese army and are compelled to fight and kill their own people who are still resisting by means of inadequate arms and by moral and spiritual resistance? Do you believe it dignified of Juan Quimbo who formerly wore on his shoulders the star of the Philippines representing thereby the courage of our people and the integrity of our system of government, to preach now the acceptance of the totalitarian and autocratic form of government? Do you believe that by doing so he dignifies and honors our people?

It pains me to read your letter saying that you and I at one time nursed identical convictions of democracy and liberty but that you have to revise your own for the sake of 'peace and tranquillity.' How can you honestly and truthfully say that you may enjoy peace and tranquillity when you are unfaithful to your own convictions? Do you mean to tell me that you have revised your convictions because you believe that they were not righteous or because you considered your personal convenience over and above the Filipino people? You may have read, I am sure, the story of Lincoln, who held firmly to the conviction that the secession of the southern states from the Northern was wrong. Consequently, when he became the president and the southern states seceded he did not hesitate to use force to compel them to remain in the Union.

The immediate result was Civil War that involved the country in the throes of a terrible conflict, that according to reliable historians produced proportionately more loss of lives, hardships and miseries than the first World War. The suffering of the people of the South was terrible, but the Union was saved and America has become thereby one of the strongest and most respected nations on the surface of the earth.

If Lincoln had revised his convictions and sacrificed them for the sake of peace and tranquillity as you did, a fatal catastrophe would have befallen the people of America. With the lesson of history clearly before us, I prefer Lincoln's example to yours and your fellow pup-

pets'. In other words, I sternly refuse to revise my convictions for the sake of temporary and false promises of peace and tranquillity.

I wish to thank you for reminding me of what General Bell wrote to Mabini, that 'only the possibility of success is the sole justification of a war, and as soon as the possibility disappears, civilization demands that for the sake of humanity the vanquished should submit to the visitors.' In calling my attention to the above content of the letter of General Bell you make the affirmation thereby that there is no 'possibility of success' on the part of American allies to defeat Japan and her colleagues. Here again you are evidently wrong. You people who have surrendered to the Japanese do not know of any news but [that] given by them to you. It shows again that you are ignorant of what is going on. For your information and guidance, let me tell you that Japan is digging her grave deeper and deeper every day in New Guinea. In China and in Burma she is on the run and is losing extensive territories which she formerly conquered. In Europe, Germany is in flight pursued by the Russians. In Africa, Tripoli and Tunis have fallen into the hands of the Allies. Everyday the cities of Italy are being bombed and smashed to pieces. The Italians will soon demand a separate peace. By June, next, the Philippines will be redeemed, definite. What are you going to do next? Revise your convictions again? Thank you, once more, for reminding me of the words of General Bell to Mabini. They serve to fortify my convictions more than ever. For the possibility of success of America and Allies over the Axis is clear as the day.

I hope I have made myself clear enough to make you understand my position. I will not surrender as long as I can stand on my feet. The people may suffer more during the next six months. To use the words of St. Paul the Apostle: The sufferings of the present are not worthy to be compared with the glories to come that shall be revealed to us.'

In the language of a wise and devout priest, 'when the hour of deliverance has come we shall count as nothing the anxiety and sorrows through which we have passed.' According to the same religious writer, 'Sufferings make opportunities for the practice of many virtues which develop greatness and nobility of soul.' He further declared that the 'grandest music of the human heart breaks forth in the days of trials: the sweetest songs are sung in sorrow: the best things in character are developed in the time of affliction.' Finally he writes, 'suffering develops manliness and thrice earnestness of purpose.' This is the crying need of the hour—**MANLINESS**.

With my kindest regards, and may God bless you and guide you, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Tomas Confesor.