

THE SILENT PROTEST OF MAN'S INNER SPIRIT *

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Tonight, we, the graduates, pass another milestone in our lives and we are faced with the simplest yet most profound questions. Where are we going? What are we to do now? What will become of us?

These same questions have confronted us before and each time we attempt to answer them, our responses vary as our principles and values become modified by time and circumstance. At this stage of our lives however, we realize that our answers will have to be definitive, for the time and circumstances we are stepping into cannot be turned back. After law school, all that remains is for us to enter the true testing ground of life itself.

As future lawyers, we are bound to uphold truth and justice. But as we hear those solemn words, we wonder what they really mean. We hear the words so often that their meaning has become relative. As was said by a Chinese philosopher more than 2000 years ago:

"When justice and benevolence are in the air, few people are really concerned with the good of others, but the majority are aware that this is a good thing, ripe for exploitation. They take advantage of the situation. For them, benevolence and justice are traps to catch birds. Thus, benevolence and justice rapidly come to be associated with fraud and hypocrisy. Then everybody doubts. And that is when trouble really begins." 1]

The trouble has indeed begun and we live in an age of distrust, distortion and disharmony. One need only pick up a daily newspaper to be made aware of the "signs of the times" and at the same instant feel that the signs are ominous. Materialism and consumerism have eroded traditional moral values; powerplay, money and worldly possessions have become of utmost importance. Moral decadence and alienation are prevalent in developed and free countries while poverty and unrest plague third world and totalitarian regimes.

The argument that the "end justifies the means" has gained wide acceptance, especially in our country, when only a generation ago, such

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1] Chuang Tzu, "Flight from Benevolence" (xx:iv, 12).

was below human dignity to espouse. Thus, power and money, once attained, can "clean a man's slate" and he can atone for everything he has done or not done thereafter and even expect to be praised as benevolent and generous by society.

However, as men and nations engage in this race for power and money, there is the silent protest of man's inner spirit manifested and found everywhere in the world; in the men and women who have that "taste for simplicity, for humility, self-effacement, silence" and who, in general, refuse "to take seriously the aggressivity, the ambition, the push and the self-importance one must display to get ahead in society." These men and women, one can literally find everywhere if one bothers to observe — from the simple farmer to the public servant of integrity, whether in a free or dictatorial state; these men and women, whether living or dead, testify to man's indomitable spirit and his capacity for peace and faith in God. They remind us of our own striving for truth and purity and our search for the basic human values, the real and essential ones which reflect our true nature as human beings.

We need to eat, we need to live. But we also need to sustain our spirit if we are to remain whole. The dual nature of man puts conflicting demands on our person as the body yearns for perfect pleasure which it can never attain as long as the spirit is alive, so does the spirit yearn for perfect peace, not possible as long as it is embodied in the physical. To live, truly *live*, requires balance and each action or response we make can never be without its physical and moral dimensions.

As we enter this mixed-up world, it will be our basic human values that will keep us from becoming the persons our parents or elders have been warning us about. These basic human values will help keep clear the true meaning of words and actions, and by keeping true to them whatever be the time and circumstance, we remain true to our human and moral nature. As future lawyers, we know how easy it is to justify any action, but if we remain true to ourselves, there need never be any justification.

We realize then that the answers to our questions have always been within us; and that the hesitancy, the difficulty we feel, lies not so much in the choice of answers but rather in the anxiousness and fear that we may not live up to them. It is our fear of the unknown, our fear of the future. It is in this fear and anxiousness that we are always left to face the question: What will become of us? This, no one can answer for only time can tell. There is though one insight shared with us by the late Pope Paul VI when he faced this question of all questions: "What will become of me?" He referred to Jesus' words to Peter:

"I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go." 2]

How true and how real. Whatever lies ahead of us one must continue to act and that action to follow Christ and our spirit must be now, today, in our youth. The future indeed belongs to the youth of today but the future of the future belongs to the youth of tomorrow.

We are taking the first step of action by joining the lists of the law graduates of the Ateneo. As I stand here and the honors are later awarded, the tribute goes not to the individuals but to the Class of 1983 for we have all dared to become men of truth and justice and hopefully will continue to dare. As Aristotle said:

"... at the Olympic games, it is not the finest and the strongest men who are crowned, but they who enter the lists, for out of these the prisemen are selected; so too in life, of the honorable and good, it is they who act who rightfully win the prizes."

As Ateneans and Christians, we need no warning that the action we take will not be easy but let us take courage from these words: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall soar with wings as in eagles. They shall run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint." 3]. So where does the power come from to see the race to its end?

From within. 4]

2] *The Jerusalem Bible*, John 21:18.

3] *New American Bible*, Isaiah 40:31.

4] Eric Liddell, "*Chariots of Fire*" (1982).



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