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Education, Truth and Justice in Philippine Society

Symposium

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SYMPOSIUM

Education, Truth and Justice in Philippine Society

Education, truth, and justice are slippery words. Popular use and misuse wear away the sharpness of their meaning. Ignorance and passion distort the clarity of the concepts. Social or political propaganda confuses their utility as tokens of communication.

Socrates never wrote a book or even a scholarly article. He was essentially a teacher. He believed that the educational ideal was truth and that the goal of education was to arrive at the truth and to use it for moral living. He maintained that if a man possessed the truth, if he were able to eliminate ignorance and passion (should we call it sin?), he would be a moral man. We can agree, for that has been the traditional goal of the university—to discover, to preserve and to communicate the truth. We can also agree that education is an essentially moral activity for it seeks to improve life, not to debase it. Truth—the truth about man—leads inevitably to justice which demands for me and for every other man a life befitting the dignity of a man.

The imperatives of truth and justice cannot be denied in Philippine society, where 51 percent of Filipino families live below the food threshold and 70 percent of them live below the poverty level, nor can the consequent role of Philippine education in the last decades of the twentieth century. Fr. Bonoan situates those imperatives in the Philippine tradition of value education which finds its historical locus in the writings of Rizal, Mabini, Kalaw and Quezon, and its present expression in the need for truth and justice in contemporary Philippine society. Fr. Gorospe and Fr. McNamara paint a rather frightening picture of the inadequacies

of Philippine science and technology in the mid-eighties. The Philippine scientist must be faithful to the truth of science—he must be competent. But the need for contextualization of science in a Third World country characterized by poverty—for science at the service of justice—is equally important. Fr. Ledesma maintains that the “science” of economics, so essential in contemporary Philippine society, cannot be divorced from the “art” of economics in a real world context. “If the present economic crisis has taught us anything, it is the realization that the espousal of traditional economic concepts devoid of social values can lead us into a false sense of progress and society.” Truth and justice must stand guard against the illusions of technical development. These values must “provide a focus and direction to the teaching and practice of economics.” Dr. Rosario-Braid discusses the “role which should be assigned to communication in awakening the conscience of, and sensitizing public opinion to the major problems confronting the world . . . and in helping towards their solution.” Fr. Bernas’ short note outlines the moral response of the University to the “ferment around the world.”

The Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines in their joint pastoral letter of 11 July 1984 spoke of “our continuing shame and sorrow as a people” and reaffirmed the truth that God has given man the obligation of regarding his neighbor “as another self bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way.” President Edgardo J. Angara of the University of the Philippines spoke in his commencement address in 1984 of the need for an “awareness of personal and social consequences of . . . behavior.” “We are still at the very beginning of learning,” Nobel Prize Winner Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote, “both in science and in the arts. I foresee a time when many of the ideas we have rejected so lightheartedly may come back into science and art; such as the existence of God, Providence, the soul, a plan and a purpose to creation, reward and punishment, free will and other such obsolete and refuted notions.” If they do not, the gates are defenseless, and the barbarians will sweep into the city of man.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.