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Notes and Comments

Notes on the CEAP National Convention

SR. M. SOLEDAD HILADO, O.S.B.

The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) held its Sixteenth National Convention on 11-13 December 1981 in Iloilo City. The association has held its biennial conventions alternately in Manila and in the provinces. The 1981 convention was the first to be held in Iloilo City. The convention theme was "The Challenge of Quality Education in Catholic schools." There was a total of 475 registered delegates — 46 from Luzon, 261 from the Visayas, and 68 from Mindanao. Of the delegates, 58 represented elementary schools, 266 secondary schools, and 151 colleges. Non-registered observers almost doubled the number of official delegates at the opening session. The site chosen, the University of San Agustin, was conveniently within walking distance or a short ride from the places where the delegates were housed. This contributed greatly to the fairly orderly running of the convention and the almost punctual start of the sessions. Visayan hospitality was strongly in evidence — from welcoming groups at airport and pier to a dinner hosted by the University and its alumni and parents-teachers associations, a cultural presentation and a guided tour.

OPENING SESSION

Holding registration in the morning was a wise arrangement and made it possible for the opening ceremonies to start on schedule at 3:30 P.M. The Most Rev. Artemio Casas, archbishop of Jaro, gave the invocation and Fr. Eduardo Perez, OSA, president of the University of San Agustin, welcomed the delegates. Dr. Josefa

Castro of the host university introduced the keynote speaker, Fr. Jose Cruz, S.J., president of the Ateneo de Manila University and president of the CEAP.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Fr. Cruz posed the challenge of quality education in his keynote address. He reminded the delegates that quality education has social implications. The crucial mission of Catholic schools today is to educate the young for intellectual and for moral leadership. "Command of language is command of power." In a country where the masses do not have such command of language, the populace is vulnerable to control by the elite. Our educational system faces a serious language problem. From the language problem stem problems in all other disciplines, resulting in serious consequences in the life of our people and our nation. The state of four basic disciplines — religion, language, mathematics and science — were discussed in greater detail later in the convention.

PLENARY SESSIONS

The second day and part of the third day were taken up by four plenary sessions, each following this pattern: an exposition of the topic by a speaker (two speakers in the case of moral education), reactions by panelists, and an open forum.

MORAL EDUCATION

Archbishop Antonio Mabutas of Davao, after referring briefly to a recent study on religious instruction in Catholic schools commissioned by the ECERI (Episcopal Commission for Education and Religious Instruction), dwelt on the mission and objectives of moral education and his proposals for bringing about such an education.

Mr. Vicente Jayme, co-chairman of the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference, gave a layman's view of the state of moral formation and cited some disturbing realities as indicators of weakness: the fact that the Philippines has the lowest economic growth rate in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the Philippine financial system being close to collapse due to fraud by well-placed indivi-

duals. The economic problems of the country are in part due to immoral and illegal dealings of public officials and private individuals. Therefore, it is necessary to "anchor man in a strong moral foundation to manage, rather than be managed, by the winds of change and technology."

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

In the first plenary session of the afternoon Bro. Andrew Gonzales of De La Salle University discussed the state of language instruction in the Philippines today. The bilingual policy imposed on schools by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1974 has resulted in progress in the use of Pilipino, but also in the neglect of English. As might be expected, implementation in the Visayas has been slow due to practical difficulties, including open opposition in some sectors and lack of teachers. Implementation has been more rapid in the Tagalog areas, but teachers find problems in the teaching of social studies (one of the subjects to be taught in Pilipino) due to the lack of technical vocabulary. Reduced exposure to English has resulted in the students' slow progress in learning the language. Social factors favoring Pilipino — the rise of nationalism, the increased use of Pilipino in mass media, etc. — do not favor English, so that it can be predicted that by the year 2,000 A.D. 90 percent of the population will be able to speak Pilipino; yet English will still be needed for international communication. Because it takes time to "intellectualize" a language, there still may not be an intellectualized Pilipino needed for use in higher instruction. English will continue to be used, but the level of competence will be low, especially in the rural area. In view of the situation some positive suggestions are offered: (1) special schools for the rural areas; (2) concerted effort in updating English; (3) assignment of the best English teachers in Grades 1 to 3; (4) re-emphasis on reading skills and composition; (5) serious work (with adequate logistical support) on the development of an intellectualized Pilipino language.

MATHEMATICS EDUCATION

Fr. Bienvenido Nebres, S.J., former dean of the Ateneo de Manila University, gave a bleak view of yet another area of Philippine

education. He maintained that what is needed is a "return to basics" and attention to three T's: teachers, textbooks, and time. There is a rapid turn-over in the teaching force due to low salaries and conditions of work. When salaries and work conditions have been improved, programs can be upgraded. Teachers are ill-prepared for the needs of mathematics today. The textbook problem is one of quantity as well as of quality. There is so much to be learned and so little time allotted to the subject in the curriculum. "Mathematics is something that one does, and it is only through long hours that one learns it."

SCIENCE EDUCATION

Dr. Emil Javier, director of the National Science Development Board (NSDB), blamed the low quality of science education and science development in the country on: (1) a lack of appreciation on the part of the Batasan Pambansa of the linkage between science and technology on the one hand, and national development on the other; (2) insufficient resources; (3) insufficient incentives for scientists and science institutions; and (4) lack of trained manpower. He proposed a revised system of governance of the NSDB that is "not centralized but dispersed yet coordinated," involving science organizations, Research and Development institutions, and industry and trade groups.

PANELS AND FORA

The comments of panelists ranged from supplementary insights to remarks distantly related to the subject under discussion. There was apparent agreement with the views presented by the speakers; hardly a dissenting comment came from either the panelists or the floor. Rather, more suggestions and recommendations were offered and experiences shared, especially from the provincial localities and regions.

COMMISSION CONSULTATIONS

The first session of the last day was devoted to group meetings of the different commissions —elementary, secondary, tertiary, and superintendents'. The meetings took the nature of consul-

tations. A desire for greater effectivity was expressed in all the groups and similar courses of action were suggested by the different commissions: the formation of regional departmental groups (or the strengthening of those that already exist) and the formation of national associations or organizations at the departmental level — elementary and secondary. (There already exist several associations at the college level.) In general the development plan prepared by the CEAP National Office was endorsed; some proposals for more efficient and effective implementation were also offered.

The superintendents' commission consultation faced problems peculiar to the group: the difficulty of holding more frequent meetings, "overloaded" superintendents, particularly in the case of diocesan superintendents who have parishes or other assignments. The group decided on meetings of superintendents by regions in addition to national meetings; furthermore, the group reiterated a recommendation to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines that bishops appoint qualified superintendents and grant them sufficient time and resources to dispense their functions.

LUNCHEON SESSION

A luncheon session was scheduled for the last day, with a talk on "The Quality of Education and Government Policies" to be delivered by the Minister of Education and Culture, Dr. Onofre Corpuz. The Minister however did not arrive, due reportedly to miscommunication regarding flight schedules. His non-appearance was doubly disappointing since a number of the suggestions and questions raised at the preceding sessions involved government policies and government action. The occasion would have provided the opportunity for a dialogue between Minister Corpuz and school administrators. The spirit of the group, however, remained unfazed and the after-lunch open forum was lively. By common consent the assembly moved on to the ratification of resolutions and statements (originally scheduled for an afternoon session), after which the convention chairman, Fr. Miguel Varela, S.J., formally declared the convention adjourned.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

It is regrettable that Minister Corpuz did not arrive to deliver his talk and reply to the questions, comments and suggestions the delegates were eager to put before him. For in a country where there is strong government control of the educational system, the quality of education cannot but be strongly influenced by government policies. It appears that government policies have been handed down without sufficient reflection either on their practical consequences or on the preparation needed for their effective implementation. Thus, for example, the bilingual policy was launched before textbooks in Pilipino were readied and technical vocabulary needed for specific disciplines and higher instruction were developed. While many, if not most, agree on the merits of bilingualism, there is general disagreement with a program of implementation that does not produce the desired goals. Similar indictments have been leveled at the changing policies in mathematics instruction: lack of appropriate textbooks and lack of well-prepared teachers. Cutting down time allotments to accommodate an ever increasing number of subjects in the curriculum has not helped in the learning of basic skills. The result is a lack of mastery of the subject not only on the part of students, but also on the part of graduates from education courses who are expected to be the future teachers of the subject. Implementation has been short on evaluation, yet changes continue to be made in rapid succession. Among the latest changes are "Return to Basics" and the discontinuance of the integrated education curriculum, the latter only two years after its introduction. While both changes are probably welcomed by most educators, the fact remains that no formal evaluation had been made to support the rationale for the change.

CONCLUSION

The good work done by the Convention Committee, the National Secretariat and the Region VI CEAP Office paid off in an orderly and well-attended convention. Professional interest and friendly exchange prevailed from start to finish. Concern for the quality of education was strongly evident. Translating this concern

into effective action programs is the order of the present and the future. The odds are great, especially where government policies and government actions are concerned, but in the words of the CEAP president: "Catholic education is an apostolate because we communicate Christ. Since it is a mission, it is graced, and as such it cannot but go forward."