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Laurel's Political and Moral Philosophy

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Notes & Comment

Laurel's Political and Moral Philosophy

It is not surprising that a man of the political and intellectual stature of Dr. Jose P. Laurel, Sr. should before the end of his life bequeath as a legacy to the Filipino people, "particularly to Filipino youth," his own religious and political beliefs. Like the philosopher Boethius who wrote his *Consolation of Philosophy* in jail, Dr. Laurel wrote his "political and moral philosophy"—*Pro Deo et Patria*—in Sugamo Prison, Tokyo. For lack of paper he used the pages of Lord Birkenhead's *The World in 2030*. His son, Sotero H. Laurel, President of the Lyceum of the Philippines, has transcribed the hand-written original, reorganizing its 73 chapters under 10 larger ones. This transcribed edition was published serially as an exclusive feature of the *Manila Bulletin* (March 9, birthday anniversary of Dr. Laurel, to March 26, 1963), and will be published separately as Vol. II of the Jose P. Laurel Memorial Series by the Lyceum Press.

Before commenting on Dr. Laurel's political and moral philosophy, it will help to recall some of the more salient events of his life which may shed light on his philosophical thought. Dr. Jose P. Laurel, Sr. was born in Tanauan, Batangas on March 9, 1891. In addition to his many academic degrees from various universities in Manila, he obtained his Doctor of Civil Law degree from Yale University. He also attended law courses at the University of Paris and the University of Oxford. He began government service at an early age and continued to hold key government positions almost to the end of his life. In 1934 he was a delegate to the Philippine Constitutional Convention where he played a major role in drafting the nation's fundamental law. During the difficult period of Japan's military occupation, he became President of the Japanese-sponsored Philippine Republic. Captured by the American armies in Japan, imprisoned in Yokohama and Tokyo, and held for trial by the People's Court in the Philippines, Dr. Laurel was freed by a grant of amnesty issued by President Roxas in 1946. Dr. Laurel was

presidential candidate in 1949 but was defeated by President Elpidio Quirino. In 1951, however, he was elected Senator. He sponsored Ramon Magsaysay's election to the Presidency. A scholar and a statesman, Dr. Jose P. Laurel, Sr., is certainly regarded as one of the Philippines' outstanding patriots. He died November 6, 1959.

It is interesting to note that the conclusion of Dr. Laurel's War Memoirs becomes the introduction to his Moral and Political Credo — *Pro Deo et Patria*. The occasion was Christmas, 1945. Significantly enough, the introduction opens on a note of peace, occasioned by the "birthday of the Prince of Peace." "... The solitude and my longing for family and home at this time," writes Dr. Laurel, "not to speak of the depressing environment, call for expression of the hidden language of the soul. Let me follow the urge: Gloria in Excelsis Deo. In Terra Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis." [Manila *Bulletin* copy.] Surely, these words were not written in a spirit of protest, resentment, or bitterness. They reflect the deep and calm serenity which pervades the whole exposition of Dr. Laurel's political and moral philosophy. While expressing fear of yet another world war, and pessimism concerning the role of the United Nations to preserve world peace (though in another context he praises the work of the UN), Dr. Laurel already anticipates the cold war between the United States and Russia and their struggle for ideological supremacy in the Far East. In the face of this conflict, Dr. Laurel hopefully points to the role of the Philippines as "an important factor in the maintenance of the necessary international equilibrium in Asia, or the Far East." The realization of this goal, according to Dr. Laurel's deep-seated conviction, depends on the "moral, intellectual, physical progress of the citizens and spiritual and material development of the whole nation."

Dr. Laurel succinctly expresses his political and moral philosophy in ten propositions, beginning with his profession of the existence of God and concluding with his optimism concerning the role of the Philippines in the "effective moral integration of the world and the establishment of universal peace." That good government and international peace must be founded on a belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, in individual, national, and international morality based on Divine Righteousness, and in Freedom as a Divine Gift—is Dr. Laurel's main thesis. In developing these themes, Dr. Laurel draws heavily from books he has read and he cites these sources not as an appeal to authority but because for him they express more adequately his own views on the matter. As a scholar and educator, it comes as no surprise that he should quote abundantly both from classical and contemporary writers, and as a Christian, from Holy Scripture. His frequent citation of various authors shows an openness of mind in a man who was always ready to welcome ideas from any

source whatever provided they spoke the truth. Behind what seems to be a series of platitudes and slogans typical of campaign speeches, there lies in *Pro Deo et Patria* a philosophical analysis of the development of world affairs and a bold proposal for radical changes in our society.

What is Dr. Laurel's concept of God? The first proposition of his religious credo begins with the words: "I believe in one Eternal God, Creator and Sustainer of the Universe." In another context, Dr. Laurel proves the existence of God from the principle of causality. "By the law of causation," he states, "man knows that he could not have created himself and that as a creature he must acknowledge the existence of his Creator." As to the other attributes of God, Dr. Laurel refers to Him as "source of life," "the Ultimate Cause," and "Supreme Law-Giver." Dr. Laurel is a strong believer in the "arm of Providence." For him all power is from God and this power is never to be invoked for political and selfish purposes. For instance, he decries the alleged fact that high ecclesiastical authorities of the Catholic Church in Japan were sent directly or indirectly to preach the principle of the co-prosperity sphere in East Asia. The important conclusion that Dr. Laurel draws from his concept of God is the belief that it makes no difference what kind of religion one professes since there exists but one and the same God for all. "He is God—your God and my God," he wrote in his *Spiritual Bulletin*.

What kind of religion did Dr. Laurel profess? In his second proposition, Dr. Laurel states: "I am a Christian and as such hold that every man is man's brother and equal." He begins his explanation of this belief with the words: "I believe in the Life of Christ and in the fundamental teachings of Christianity." Dr. Laurel singles out the fundamental Christian truth of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man and its irreconcilability with discrimination of any kind, whether of race, religion, or nationality. To Dr. Laurel, the true Christian is one who practices what he believes. Dr. Laurel makes a distinction between Christians and Christianity. "There are many Christians," he says, "but very little Christianity in their lives and among them." Quoting Lord Averbury, he adds that there is "more true Christianity in some pagan philosophers than in certain Christian theologians." The existence of discrimination on account of race, creed, or color, Dr. Laurel attributes to a lack of realization and practice of the Christian precept of universal charity.

Does Dr. Laurel have a natural-law theory? His fourth religious proposition affirms that "man lives in a triple world: physical, intellectual, and moral. To live a purposive and fruitful life he must abide by the laws that govern this triple world." Man therefore cannot violate these "permanent and inflexible laws of Nature" without impunity and without natural sanction. The end of man, accord-

ing to Dr. Laurel, is happiness, and the means to attain man's final goal is obedience to the laws of this triple world. In this connection there are two statements of Dr. Laurel which at first would seem to imply a closed naturalism and a denial of the hereafter as well as a sort of moral relativism. However, the first statement, "Withal, God created man for this world; man lives in this world; and there is no other world for him," merely stresses the obligation of man to perfect himself in this life, without denying the next life. The second statement of Dr. Laurel that "religious attitudes and moral standards (?) vary" (sic Manila *Bulletin* copy), is but a historical description of man's subjective and "unending search for truth" and his attempt "to know the Unknowable" (Dr. Laurel uses this term in the Kantian sense from his reading of Alexis Carrel's *Man, The Unknown*). In extolling the fact that man's power to know and master the universe has grown by leaps and bounds throughout the course of human history, Dr. Laurel makes Alexis Carrel's penetrating philosophical and theological observation his own; namely, that while man "lives, wonders, discovers, hopes and fears, the infinite mystery and eternal significance of things remain unknown." As far as Dr. Laurel is concerned, in his doctrine of the triple world, "science, religion and morality are neither in conflict nor irreconcilable with each other." This is Dr. Laurel's way of saying that truth is one and cannot contradict itself. Perhaps the best way to describe Dr. Laurel's moral philosophy is to say that he held some kind of self-perfection theory. Certainly such a moral philosophy reveals a man who was a natural Christian.

Dr. Laurel's concept of the "guiding principle of human behaviour, individual and collective" and of the "foundation-source" of all morality which "must be theological and monotheistic" is really a corollary of his thesis that man lives in a triple world and that all laws find their ultimate source in the Supreme Law-Giver. His fifth proposition reads: "The foundation of good government is morality: the basis of morality is Righteousness which is divine." Dr. Laurel defines morality as "conformity with the Divine Order and Command as we, with the light that we have seen, understand them." (For the sake of clarity, a comma has been substituted for the word "and" in the Manila *Bulletin* text which is obscure.) This last phrase which qualifies man's knowledge of the Divine Order and Command might on the surface imply a subjectivistic philosophy, but closer inspection shows that Dr. Laurel is emphasizing the subjective element in morality without necessarily denying objective morality. This is clear from the context and from Dr. Laurel's reasoning. He is hard put to see how subjective religion can be the basis of good government since there will be as many bases as there are different religions. A cardinal point in Dr. Laurel's philosophy is that the only true basis of morality, which in turn is the basis of religious

unity, is "Righteousness which is divine." Just what Dr. Laurel means by divine Righteousness becomes clear from his comparison, by way of citation, between the Book of Proverbs and the Gospel of Buddha. Even between entirely disparate religions like Christianity and Buddhism, there can still be common agreement as to the meaning of Righteousness. Dr. Laurel claims that in the last analysis all religions alike hold that Righteousness is "God's holy will." Citing the spiritual Almanac for Service Men, 1944-45, he holds that "God's all holy will is the ultimate sanction of human morality and that man's true freedom and happiness depend on his obedience to the will of God *as known to him*." (Italics Laurel's.) Once again, Dr. Laurel is thinking in terms of individual conscience rather than in terms of a philosophy of subjectivism. "Righteousness, then," Dr. Laurel concludes, "is at once the basis and guiding principle of morality—individual, familial, governmental, social, national and international."

Dr. Laurel denies the contention of the pragmatic school of morals that there can be no such thing as *individual* morality, i.e., that the morality of human behaviour depends solely on its external and social effects. On the contrary, Dr. Laurel affirms that man has duties towards himself and may not "maim or wantonly kill himself; neither may he disregard Divine Providence." This is a point well made in view of the modern mentality which divorces private from public morality. To those who think that there is no place for religion or morality in business, politics, and government, Dr. Laurel is most outspoken: "Government without morality is gangsterism or banditry." Both family and national morality must be based on divine Righteousness. It is interesting to note that Dr. Laurel refers to St. Thomas Aquinas' *ordinatio rationis* to show the need of morality which is "either self-imposed or dictated by external authority" in man's social life. He argues from man's social nature to man's obligations towards the family and the state. To fulfill these obligations man must strike a balance between egoism and altruism. Curiously enough, Dr. Laurel works out an algebraic formula in which Righteousness turns out to be the common denominator between egoism and altruism.

With regard to international morality, Dr. Laurel cites General MacArthur's "theological approach" to the problem of international peace in the latter's speech of Sept. 2, 1945, on the occasion of the Japanese surrender, on board the *SS Missouri*. World peace must be based on divine Righteousness which wills that men learn to live with each other on account of their common origin, nature, and destiny. "We are agreed for instance," says Dr. Laurel, "in the oneness and solidarity of mankind... that notwithstanding differences in physical development and appearances, customs and traditions, fun-

damentally and essentially, God created man 'after His image' and for that reason has the same emotions and perceptibilities, and the same perennial striving for a better and more abundant life." (It is not clear from the Manila *Bulletin* text whether the antecedent of the verb "has" is man or God.)

In his sixth proposition, Dr. Laurel considers freedom as "a Divine endowment and not a matter of grant or concession by the earthly powers that be." This statement goes directly contrary to the positivist doctrine that all human rights are conferred by the state. It is clear that Dr. Laurel holds a theory of natural rights. He takes Mabini's definition of freedom as "physical, intellectual and moral or spiritual development without unnecessary restraint or curtailment." Like life itself, freedom is one of the absolutely essential conditions for an "integrated human life." Dr. Laurel cites Don Vicente Ilustre of Batangas, "La libertad no se pide, se toma" —to show that freedom is a divine gift. True freedom is never absolute; it has its limitations; true freedom is not licence. "The fruitful employment of freedom," the seventh proposition reads, "does not depend upon any fixed formula but upon the observance of its (freedom's) inherent limitations." Following the definition of "political freedom" given by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, namely, "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live," Dr. Laurel insists that this right ultimately comes from God and not from the state. As to the question of the best form of government, Dr. Laurel's ideas substantially reflect Catholic political thought. Democracy is not necessarily the best form of government; even the democratic idea evolves and changes and it must be adapted to a people's cultural development and temperament. What is of primary importance is not so much the structure of government but its successful functioning. Quoting Tennyson, Laurel says that in the end "what is best administered is best."

Applying the principle of the best form of government as one freely chosen by the people and as one best suited to their needs, Dr. Laurel in his eighth proposition, proposes the idea that "Republicanism vitalized by state socialism is the best form of government for the Filipinos in this epoch." Repeating Daniel Webster, he affirms that "the people must remain as the ultimate source of all political power and authority." In this respect, one can recognize in Dr. Laurel's political thought something akin to the popular-consent theory of Bellarmine and Suarez. As a practical statesman, Dr. Laurel does not wish to impose democracy from without upon the Filipino people without adaptation. With a bit of humor, he says that the American democratic "coat" is too big for the Filipino.

That is why the Filipinos have remodeled it to suit their tropical needs and tastes.

Dr. Laurel mentions three essential requirements for a genuine republicanism: (1) popular representation, (2) control by the people, and (3) periodic renovation. Besides these three essential conditions, the Philippines should have a socialized democracy which Dr. Laurel defines as "a form of state socialism by which the state is permitted to intervene and control in matters necessarily connected or involved in the promotion of economic security and social justice." Democracy, he argues, will survive only on social justice, and economic security is democracy's first guarantee. Clearly then, Dr. Laurel takes a middle-of-the-road position between two extremes—*laissez-faire* individualism on the one hand and exaggerated socialism on the other. In other words, he advocates moderate socialism which opts for moderate government control and social and economic planning on a national basis.

The application of Dr. Laurel's political philosophy to the Philippine scene, though dated in its concrete proposals, remains relevant in view of the basic principles he develops to guide the Philippines in its role in world affairs and in the establishment of world peace. In his tenth proposition, Dr. Laurel boldly states: "National planning is essential if the Philippines were eventually to extricate herself from her present condition of helplessness or puppetry." In order to appreciate the timeliness and urgency of these words, we need but recall the fact that when Dr. Laurel was writing his War Memoirs, the Philippines was faced with the immediate task of post-war reconstruction. Dr. Laurel's four-point program at the end of his book may at first appear to be just another political platform, but the fact that he wrote it in prison when his political future looked dark, gives the lie to any political motivation typical of election platforms. It was the philosopher, not the politician, who was writing this blueprint for the rehabilitation of the Philippines.

The concluding ideas of Dr. Laurel on nationalism and internationalism, in the face of the rapid rise of nationalism in our day, deserve our close attention: they reveal how moderate and farsighted Dr. Laurel was in his views. Philippine society, in Dr. Laurel's vision, must be built not only in terms of a combination of individual freedom and collectivism but also in terms of a combination of nationalism and internationalism. Dr. Laurel cautions the Filipino people against a false sense of nationalism which is an obstacle to Christian universal brotherhood and a jeopardy to international unity and harmony. He urges his people to transcend the national standpoint and look to the international common good. Although he points out the evils of colonial exploitation and makes a plea for the aban-

donment of the policy of the "white man's burden," Dr. Laurel is surprisingly temperate in his condemnation of imperialism or colonialism. He was thinking more along the lines of Wendell L. Willkie's "One World" in which there shall be an equality of opportunity for every race and every nation. Without explicitly mentioning it, he is clearly against the policy of isolationism. Since the Philippines is dependent on other sovereign nations both economically and diplomatically, it is imperative that it should plan well both on the national and international level.

In international life, Dr. Laurel reiterates, the Filipino people must do its part to bring about "world unity which necessarily means the abandonment of many nationalistic and narrow doctrines or theories." The colonial nations on their part must put an end to selfish imperialism which is the root cause of war. It is in this context of internationalism that Dr. Laurel quotes Pius XII ("Wisdom—Not Weapons of War," *Collier's*, Jan. 5, 1946, p. 12) who spoke of a "unity not restricted to any one people, but a universal solidarity established on the foundation of mutual interests and common destinies of all peoples." Thus Dr. Laurel exhorts the Filipino people to participate towards the "realization of the supreme Christian ideal of universal peace and universal brotherhood" and of "patriotism which is world wide and devotion to the entire human race."

Curiously enough, in his educational program, Dr. Laurel believes that Hellenic culture, because of its idea of progress and creativity, will do more for the Philippines than Confucianism, because of the latter's traditionalism and dogmatism. His solution to the agrarian problem is some intelligent form of government control. Commenting on the Co-Prosperity Sphere policy or the "Asia for the Asiatics" slogan of the Japanese Imperial Forces, Dr. Laurel gives it a reasonable interpretation without prejudice to international understanding and peace. Dr. Laurel ends on an optimistic note, confident that the Philippines, though still an underdeveloped country, poor economically and weak politically, will emerge as a great factor of international balance.

Dr. Laurel's "political and moral philosophy" is significant not because of any profound or original philosophical insights (his religious and political ideas seem commonplace enough), but because of the revelation it has given us of his character and of the kind of man Dr. Laurel was. His religious and political beliefs were so much a part of him and so ingrained, so to speak, in his very being that even in jail and in his darkest moments, he thought them important enough to be put down in writing as his legacy to the Filipino people.

Moreover, the cardinal tenets of his philosophy appear to reflect his own personal experience. If his religious philosophy stressed the

Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, it was because this was the fundamental truth he lived by and in his opinion the one idea whose realization by all men would restore the unity and solidarity of mankind which had been shattered by the war and was once again threatened by the state of world affairs. If Dr. Laurel singled out human freedom as a precious gift of God while at the same time insisting that true freedom is never absolute and unlimited, perhaps imprisonment gave him that realization of what it meant to be free.

Granting that Dr. Laurel found in his *Credo* a system of beliefs, a source of strength, we may ask a further question: How would one evaluate this *Credo* on the bases of reason and revelation? From the viewpoint of human reason alone, it is admirable as a whole and as far as it goes. That it does not go far enough is quite understandable in view of the fact that a summary, written in the unfavorable circumstances of imprisonment, cannot be expected to represent necessarily a complete or final statement of a man's philosophical position. Dr. Laurel's *Credo* presents the picture of a philosopher who espouses a sound though partial system of natural religion and morality, and who, moreover, considers himself a Christian and embraces Christianity because he seems to find in the Christian religion substantial agreement with and an inspiring confirmation of his philosophical thought. Although Dr. Laurel rejects complete moral relativism and opposes a positivistic approach to law and rights, his *Credo* nevertheless seems to stress unduly the subjective aspect of religion and morality.

Dr. Laurel was born and brought up a Catholic. His *Credo*, if taken as a statement by a Catholic, cannot be accepted by Catholics in its entirety without qualification. From a Catholic and even a genuinely Christian point of view, it is deficient and leaves much to be desired. There is nothing in his *Credo* which shows that Dr. Laurel believed in the necessity of divine revelation or that he accepts Christianity as an objectively *revealed* religion. Perhaps the fact that Dr. Laurel, in his later life, embraced Masonry accounts for his statement that all religions are equally good and that Christianity is simply the Fatherhood and Brotherhood of Man. The conspicuous absence of any mention of the other fundamental dogmas of Christianity like the mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Mystical Body of Christ, and of the Catholic Church as the sole organ of divine revelation and salvation, lends strong support to a Masonic interpretation of his religious *Credo*. As it stands it is difficult to escape such an interpretation. Certainly, if Dr. Laurel died reconciled with the Catholic Church, he must have retracted, explicitly or implicitly, his Masonic beliefs, especially his statement that all religions are equally good.

Our criticism of Dr. Laurel's political and moral philosophy is necessarily limited to the extent that it is based solely on an exclusive analysis of his *Credo—Pro Deo et Patria*. How far Dr. Laurel's *Credo* can be said to represent definitely his political and religious thought or merely a position arrived at in prison, can be decided only after a thorough investigation of his other writings and speeches. In this respect the past and forthcoming Dr. Jose P. Laurel Memorial Series of publications will be most welcome. Until further study is made of the entire *corpus laureliana*, Dr. Laurel's *Credo* cannot be taken simply as his political and moral philosophy. Moreover, some conclusions made in our present evaluation of his *Credo* will remain tentative.

Yet with all these fine (and needed) distinctions made, one is still impressed with Dr. Laurel's political and moral philosophy as somehow the summation of a life truly dedicated to God and his country. It was most fitting then that he entitled his Moral and Political *Credo—Pro Deo et Patria*—an autobiography which reveals the soul of a great man who lived for God and his country.

VITALIANO R. GOROSPE

School Ethics Reconsidered

The low estate of ethical behavior in some circles in government, business, and industry has been noted with alarming frequency in recent newspaper and magazine articles. One reads over and over again that honesty and integrity are fast disappearing from public life. This slump in morals has, of course, been going on for some time, but the mere fact that there is a slump need not make us accept it as something that is here to stay. It is a sign of the times; but we make the times and we can, if we wish, start a movement in the opposite direction. For this, inevitably, we must focus our attention on the schools. Unfortunately, what has been happening in the educational world is not likely to convince people that the school, college, or university can work the needed miracle.

An observation of educational processes in our schools leaves us in no doubt that there is a moral slump here too. Even if the majority of students and teachers keep fairly high standards of honesty, the prevalence of a wide range of educational malpractices justify many of the attacks that have been leveled at our institutions of learning.

Any one who has had even a remote connection with certain colleges and universities is familiar with the prevalent practice of cheating or copying at examinations. Every twelve months or so we are