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The Death of the Great

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EDITORIAL

The Death of the Great

I

ON Sunday 17 March 1957 an hour after midnight a large crowd of people gathered at the airport at Lahug in Cebu to bid goodbye to President Magsaysay and his party. A few minutes later the "Mt. Pinatubo" with the President and twenty-six men on board took off into the night. It was a brilliant night, the moon was full, the pilot radioed "unlimited visibility" ahead. And that was the last ever heard from the plane. It disappeared in the night.

Four hours later, when the plane was hopelessly overdue, the greatest air search in Philippine history began. This country will ever be grateful to the United States of America for the help extended by the armed forces of the United States which sent every available aircraft into the air to aid in the search. It is at such times as these—in moments of national crisis or disaster—that the genuine and deeply-felt friendship between Americans and Filipinos becomes manifest. There was no stinting of effort, no haggling over conditions, no bickering about protocol in the way the Philippine and American air forces joined hands and searched the islands and the seas for the President of the Philippines.

The events of the next few days are now history: the all-day search for the missing plane, the finding of a lone survivor, the difficult trek to the wreckage, the agonizing wait for con-

firmation of the President's death and the heart-breaking effort to identify the bodies that were charred and mangled beyond recognition. And then the bringing back of the body of President Magsaysay to Manila, the three-day lying in state and finally the funeral procession attended by over a million people who broke police cordons and all rules of decorum to get close to the casket of their lost leader.

A wave of grief has swept over these islands such as has never before been experienced. Presidents have died before, some of them well beloved and much lamented, but there was something different in the mourning over Ramón Magsaysay, a difference not only in intensity but also in kind. There was a feeling of numbness and of shock. There was something almost despairing in the grief, as if hopes had been dashed to the ground and the very virtue of faith itself had been roughly shaken. There was something personal about the grief, as if each one had lost a part of himself. A passage from Tacitus comes to mind: *Breves et infausti populi Romani amores*; how short-lived and ill-starred are the men whom the Roman people love!

It is remarkable how much the grief and shock of the Filipino people have been shared by almost all the world. There was something genuine in the expressions of sympathy transcending the banalities of convention. The Philippines is an insignificant country in respect of size and power: yet the President of the Philippines dies and the whole world is shocked at the loss. That was perhaps the measure of his greatness.

"Ramón Magsaysay burst into public life like a fresh wind after a long, suffocating day," said the ex-president Don Sergio Osmeña. "He died in the night while his people, once more enjoying security and once more full of hope, peacefully slept. They woke up in the morning to discover with a shock and to grieve with a broken heart over their sudden misfortune."

Magsaysay was not impeccable. He was a politician and he made some of the mistakes that politicians make. It is characteristic of the basic goodness of our people that in his death the mistakes have been forgotten and only the greatness

remembered. It will take time before the nation discovers the full extent of that greatness.

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of that greatness is the fact that at his death his widow and his children, no longer entitled to live in the presidential palace, were literally without a home. They were homeless. This is an inconvenience which the bereaved family has accepted simply and with dignity: but it is also a proud fact of which they have every reason to boast for it is a symbol of Magsaysay's integrity. In a political world so often cynically corrupt, Magsaysay's honesty and integrity shine with dramatic brilliance.

In God's providence this example of honesty and integrity was perhaps Ramón Magsaysay's best contribution to this country. His plans were great, but other men can execute them or perhaps even improve on them. But it was necessary at this time to restore the people's faith in public men. It was necessary to give convincing proof that men in public life can and must be men of integrity. Magsaysay dead has thus rendered greater service than he might have done had he continued to live. While bewailing his loss we must thank God for giving us—even for a short time—Ramón Magsaysay.

II

There were two men who died with the President who deserve more than passing mention. One was a member of his cabinet, the Secretary of Education Gregorio Hernandez Jr. In a country where the white-collar job and the university diploma have received almost idolatrous worship, he was persistent in his efforts to restore proper values in education by insisting on the one hand on stricter standards of intellectual excellence and on the other on a more healthy respect for manual labor. His article in this issue (on the problem of "human erosion") exemplifies the educational principles for which he stood. And in a country where for half a century hostility to religion has been made almost the cornerstone of educational policy, he espoused openly and fearlessly—yet withal

tactfully—the cause of God and religion in both public and private schools. For this he has been attacked in certain sections of the press and in certain university circles in Manila. But to be attacked for espousing the cause of God and religion is surely a badge of honor.

The other man was Jesús Paredes Jr. The general public knew him as a popular radio commentator, elegant and eloquent in both English and Tagalog, but his friends knew him as an incomparable person—a brilliant student, a keen-minded lawyer, an actor, orator, playwright, a professor bubbling with energy, a splendid Catholic, a good husband and the fond father of ten children. With his exceptional talents, his versatility and his amazingly charming personality Jess Paredes could have been a very prominent man in the Philippines and perhaps a wealthy man. He chose instead to dedicate his talents and his energies to an obscure post, that of Executive Secretary of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines. To work for Catholic education is never financially lucrative and it is often attended with trifling annoyances and continually demanding sacrifices often bordering on the heroic. If Jess Paredes has not left behind him a fortune, he has instead left something much more precious, a legacy of unstinting, unselfish service to religion.

At his death one of his classmates remarked that Jess Paredes had seemed to take life as a joke. He seemed always happy, always laughing, and even when he was attacking the enemies of the Church, he did it with a chuckle as if it amused him hugely to see anyone so stupid as to go against the interests of God or religion. It is only now that people are waking up to the extent of the service that Jess Paredes had rendered to religion and the sacrifice that that service involved.

A small token of recognition from the Holy See came a few years ago when he was given the medal *Prc Ecclesia et Pontifice*. That phrase would be a fitting epitaph for Jess Paredes: he worked for the cause of religion and of moral principles and of their guardians: the Church and the Supreme Pontiff.

There is at Novaliches a tiny cemetery where the Jesuits are buried. Jesuits of different nations lie buried there: Filipinos, Spaniards, Americans, Chinese. Some of them were well-known. The great Father Selga is buried there and the much revered Father Mulry and the well beloved Father Mudd and Father Delaney at whose funeral some 20,000 were present. Some time before his death Jess Paredes had attended the burial of a Jesuit in that tiny cemetery and when he got home he told his wife: "When I die that's where I'd like to be buried—among the Jesuits." His widow and family remembered this wish and made a formal request to that effect. The request could not be granted as no layman could be buried at Novaliches. But they did the next best thing: they scooped up a handful of earth from that tiny cemetery and buried it with the remains of Jess Paredes. That little symbolic act might epitomize his whole life. In life and in death he was Atenean to the core, imbued with the spirit of the men in whose tradition he had been brought up, the spirit of St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius Loyola.

In pace requiescant.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD S.J.

FATHER CHARLES DEPPERMAN S.J.

We regret to announce the death of Father Charles Deppermann S.J., director emeritus of the Manila Observatory and contributor to PHILIPPINE STUDIES. He died 8 May 1957, barely a year after the death of his predecessor and fellow-scientist, Father Miguel Selga S.J. Father Deppermann joined the staff of the Manila Observatory in 1926 and became its director after Father Selga's retirement in 1946. His contributions to science, like Father Selga's, are known to scientists all over the world, particularly in the fields of his specialty: meteorology and frontology, and lately also in seismology. His death is a great loss to Philippine scientific research. With the scientists of the world we mourn his passing and beg the pious reader to pray for the repose of his soul.

FILIPINO STUDENTS

Where educational facilities have been provided, Filipino children and youth have responded by enrolling in large numbers, and their parents have responded equally well by demonstrating their willingness to make great financial sacrifices in order that their children may receive an education. Irrespective of the handicaps faced by Filipino school children in having to learn to read, write and speak in a language strange to them, the children have proved themselves to be apt pupils, and those who have been fortunate enough to be able to continue their studies in colleges and universities have in general been excellent college students.

Report of the Mission to the Philippines
28 July 1949 UNESCO (Paris 1950) p. 17