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Philippine Social Life and Youth **by Antonio Isidro, Ph.D**

Review Author: Gregory G. Horgan

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BOOK REVIEWS

PHILIPPINE SOCIAL LIFE AND YOUTH. By Antonio Isidro, Ph.D. Philippine Education Company, Manila. 1953. Pp. xiii-476. P8.00.

Professor Isidro has written a very literate textbook on Philippine social life for high school students, excellent in format with an outline of the matter to be treated before each unit and unit-chapter, a summary at the end of each chapter and numerous suggestions for student projects. The book follows closely the requirements of the board of textbooks and has been included on the approved library list by the Bureau of Private Schools.

Philippine Social Life and Youth makes no pretense at being an original study, the result of a new sociological investigation. Its aim is "to provide our youth with facts and information essential to the understanding of contemporary Philippine social life" and secondly, "to develop in them attitudes that are indispensable in their roles as good citizens of our young republic." Because the aim is essentially practical, this is no dispassionate presentation of sociological fact. If the author presents a study of man's biological equipment and of character, he does so to inculcate habits of learning; if he discusses Filipino traditions, he urges the continuance of the good and the abandonment of the bad; if he investigates historical influences, he assesses the contributions made by each foreign contact; if he writes of existing legislation, he urges cooperation with law. The book is exhortatory throughout.

The basic sources are the Constitution of the Philippines, the Code of Citizenship and Ethics, the aims of education as formulated by the National Commission on Educational, Scientific and Cultural Matters and by the Joint Congressional

Committee on Education, the Decalogue of the *Ang Bagong Katipunan*, and the writings "of our frontier thinkers," a good number of whom turn out to be prominent Masons.

The "facts and information" supplied about contemporary Philippine life are mostly of two types. There is here another description of our family, rural and urban *mores*, such as the foreigner can find in many other places (although better here in both completeness and objectivity than in most others), and such as the observant Filipino adult already knows from experience. For the rest, the author is usually content to describe the various Philippine laws, enactments of public education, government agencies and international organizations and the social work they aim at accomplishing.

Philippine Social Life and Youth is a very representative example of the philosophy that has been in possession for some years among the better public educational leaders in the Philippine Islands. It partakes both of the virtues and the defects of that philosophy.

Throughout the book there is no mistaking the author's obvious love of his country, its traditions, its constitution and laws, its government and its public schools. He laments the sufferings of his people due to poverty and other social evils. He respects religion, makes no distinctions between religions and considers that religion assists the all important work of character formation and therefore is a social benefit. One cannot read the book without coming to like Professor Isidro for his sincerity and goodness of heart.

It is therefore with some regret that we add a few adverse comments. The study of man's biological equipment and of character is behavioristic in tone and is guilty of such oversimplifications as the following: "An enlarged cerebrum makes man a better thinker [than the animals]"; "Free hands and erect position enable him to record his experience"; "Of all living forms man possesses the largest cerebrum in proportion to body weight. As a consequence man is enabled to reason . . ." A little later we find, "The point to remember is that heredity sets the basis for our reactions and environment determines the nature of our behavior." One would look in vain for a word about the soul of man or even about the fact of free-will. Yet in justice to the author, it must be said that such materialism is not incorporated into the rest of the book. That Professor Isidro is not an atheist, a materialist nor a behaviorist is implicit in a hundred other places and in the whole tone of the book. The same contradiction is seen in the description of a positivistic origin of the family and where on page 323 man

is described as originally antisocial, much in the manner of the Hobbesian *homo homini lupus*, and again on pages 344 and 345 where the description of the elements that make up the culture of a people is tainted with moral and legal positivism. Yet numerous other passages could be cited to show that the Professor himself is not a positivist.

Unfortunately the book leaves us with the impression that any important movement for social betterment is to be planned, and directed by government and carried out by government largely with the cooperation of the public schools. Programs initiated from below receive scant mention or none at all. The very necessary functions to be performed by cooperatives, unions, and other free associations would be assisted substantially if they had been given space in such a high school textbook as Professor Isidro has written. As it stands, however, government looms much too large on the social horizon. Moreover, where government has established an agency to assist in the solution of a social problem, the book leaves us with the impression that now the problem is solved. More insistence on the subsidiary function of government would have helped the book enormously.

This is true also of the treatment of public and private schools. Education is generally treated as a government function. Private schools receive a word of praise once in passing and for the rest must be content to be included in statistical accounts and to be reminded that they are under the supervision of government. Yet the article of the constitution which establishes such supervision is to be interpreted in the light of the preceding article, (Art. II, Sect. IV) where the character of government function is clearly subsidiary to the "natural right" of parents to educate their children. The same inversion of primacy is found in other such exhortations as "The school must advise the home as to the habits to be formed and those to be broken."

The nonsectarian position that Professor Isidro has perforce to adopt leads to the substitution of democracy for more rational absolutes which in turn leads to such exaggerations as "Training for democratic life is the supreme goal of our schools." His attempt to simplify and edify is no doubt the cause of his slighting Spain's contribution to education in the Philippines and of painting Spain in its more villainous aspect in Philippine history. (This, in spite of an effort to be sympathetic towards Spain in chapter 16.) Many other statements need softening. Amongst them are: "Nearly all landed estates have been purchased by the government";

"The preservation of our independence and of our Republic is our highest goal"; "For its (the state's) preservation, the Filipino people must be ready to make any necessary sacrifice"; "Patriotism is the keynote of our educational objectives"; "The public school system develops patriotism of the highest type", and somewhat later, "The Constitution is the repository of the collective wisdom and the highest ideals of our people." Later the same constitution is called "the highest expression of the ideals of our people."

Catholics will also find distasteful the inclusion of the YMCA and YWCA among the only four organizations for the assistance of youth which are mentioned in the book and this without an indication of the fact of their Protestantism or of the many Catholic organizations engaged in the same work. Catholic high school students are also given as a project a survey of the reasons for and against relaxing divorce laws, after which they are considered competent to draw their own conclusions. In other words, although governmental and school administrative edicts deserve only full hearted cooperation, the moral directions of Jesus Christ and the Church are not to be accorded the same respect. They are to be subjected to the mature judgments of high school students.

In his foreword, Professor Isidro modestly disclaims mastery in all the branches of knowledge needed in such a book as this. It would seem that he supplied the lack of technical knowledge, especially of the philosophical foundations in the fields of anthropology, psychology and political philosophy, from the wrong books. These sections, which constitute a comparatively small part of the book, are the weakest and are built upon a materialistic and positivistic philosophy that he himself obviously does not accept. When the author writes as the competent teacher, which he apparently is, or from personal observation and from his own convictions, his Christian instincts are in command. Making allowance for the exuberance of his love of country which at times shades off into mere love of government, and for his desire to edify and for the nonsectarian position he is forced to occupy, he has written a textbook which will prove useful to a discriminating teacher who has at hand books of more universal worth.

GREGORY G. HORGAN
