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## APCAS National Conference of 1984

Colette Condon

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## APCAS National Conference of 1984

COLETTE CONDON

The National Conference of the Association of Philippine Colleges of Arts and Sciences (APCAS) was held on 19-21 July 1984 at the Ateneo de Manila Professional Schools, Makati, Metro Manila, with 170 registrants from the thirteen regional chapters. Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J., President of the Ateneo de Manila University, delivered the welcome address and Jaime C. Laya, Minister of Education, Culture, and Sports, gave the keynote speech.

The conference theme, Values Formation and Moral Development in Arts and Sciences Education, sounded a timely note in a nation still reeling from a year marked by shocking violations of values and insistent demands by the public for moral responsibility and moral accountability. It is significant that college students, faculty, and administrators have been prominent in this demand for a morally "born-again" nation. It is also significant that this conference theme did not signal any new or novel approach to education simply to meet a crisis situation. Rather, as pointed out by Fr. Raul J. Bonoan of the Ateneo de Manila University in his opening talk, the theme originated from the Education Act of 1982, which states that the formation of moral and spiritual values is a national development goal along with socio-economic growth, and that moral integrity and spiritual vigor are aims of the general education program on the tertiary level.

Perhaps we can go further in tracing the roots of the theme to the very word "to educate," which means, according to Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary*, "to rear," "to develop mentally and morally." Both academics and values, therefore, go hand in hand in education, regardless of any Act or Decree. But, if the roots are so deep, inherent in the very idea of education, the disturbing

question before us is why, in such a highly educated society, are we experiencing political, social, and economic realities that negate a vigorous sense of values and moral integrity? Why are so many products of our education system, equipped as they are with technological expertise, so often implicated in political and economic anomalies, at odds with our sense of values and moral expectations?

These are questions every educational institution, every educator — indeed, every student — seems to be reflecting upon today. Somewhere along the way, it would seem, the education process has relegated value formation and moral development to the sidelines, to the realm of accidents of education rather than its substance. If this be so, we can appreciate the need to stress at the very start of the conference that its concern was to show that “values formation should occur not just over and above, side by side, or parallel to academic training, but rather that the two must be fused into a unified process; that value formation should take place precisely through the teaching of the humanities, the natural and social sciences.” Consequently, it was the task of the various speakers prominent in these fields to share ways and means of achieving this unified end in the present times.

Fr. Jaime Bulatao, S.J., of the Ateneo de Manila University, shared his views on the psychological process of value formation. Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta of De La Salle University, Fr. Antonio Ledesma, S.J. of Xavier University, and Prof. Ponciano Bennagen of the University of the Philippines gave their ideas on forming values through the teaching of their fields, namely, political science, economics, and sociology respectively. Dr. Roger Posadas of the University of the Philippines spoke for the sciences, while Prof. Pacita Guevara-Fernandez of the University of the Philippines and Dr. Conrado Aquino, former President of the University of the East, spoke for the humanities: literature and philosophy.

The important task of Fr. Bonoan was to contextualize the theme within the Filipino tradition of moral education and the promotion of moral values. (See pp. 401-15.) Tracing the tradition from the Spanish Period to the twentieth century, from Rizal to President Quezon, he identified specific characteristics of the Filipino ethic and social values system, with emphasis on Rizal and Mabini. For Rizal, the task of nation building called for education based on moral regeneration, and the national ethic called for

people acting with courage and integrity in the face of persecution, for a people — especially the national leadership — setting a good example by lives of virtue, integrity, and fortitude, and for a leadership acting with selfless motivation.

Mabini had also stressed the need for an internal revolution — a radical moral transformation — as well as the external revolution. Certainly, as Fr. Bonoan pointed out, Mabini was not timid in his indictment of the national leadership for its moral death. He made his point clearly: ethical laws have primacy over constitutions, laws and decrees; attempts at social or political changes must be justified by moral and spiritual values. In concluding his talk, Fr. Bonoan focused on two such values: Truth and Justice, the primary virtues for today's society. At this point, he gave practical ways in which to awaken the consciousness of our students. Exposure and immersion programs, integrated into the curriculum, will bring students face to face with the injustices which are the daily fare of so many fellow Filipinos.

The conference proceeded to the discussion of particular disciplines, among them, politics and economics, which are woven into the fabric of our daily lives. Both Dr. Villacorta and Fr. Ledesma reiterated the need to teach their respective courses, political science and economics, as value-oriented subjects. The development of skills in political and economic analysis are needed to enable students to evaluate the dynamics of our times. In his brief paper, Dr. Villacorta enumerated seven fundamental issues which are the concern of political science, six root causes of political apathy, and the various "old fashioned" values of democracy. Rather than concentrating on knowing the constitution, definitions of terms, structures of government, he said, students need to be aware of two crucial moralities: the *morality of power* and the *morality of nationalism*. With knowledge of the morality of power, students will be aware of alternative strategies which will protect, not suspend, the basic human freedoms. With knowledge of the morality of nationalism, they will not be intimidated nor led astray by the too easy labelling of "subversive" or "unpatriotic" those acts of dissent from or opposition to national policies.

Similarly, Fr. Ledesma's paper noted that there is no room for so-called "neutral" economics. (See pp. 436-40.) Values as goals must be the directing force in the teaching and practice of economics. His discussion centered on five social values which link up

the "science" of economics with the "art" of economics. These are: (a) in a people-oriented economics, the fulfillment of basic needs is the starting point for human development; (b) equity (in addition to increased productivity) is a crucial dimension for overall economic development; (c) a preferential option for the poor in development strategy requires careful identification of the subclasses among the rural and urban poor; (d) the people's participation brings about net economic returns for the groups involved and for the larger society as well; (e) economic nationalism is simply another way of saying that the country's natural resources should be conserved for Filipinos and exploited by them. Fr. Ledesma ended by saying that the social sciences and the liberal arts, should also be viewed as "liberating" arts vis-a-vis the many structural problems in today's world.

Professor Bennagen criticized the tendency to decontextualize values from their social and historical contexts. Such decontextualization prevents us from seeing the "dynamic and reciprocal relationship between social change and value change." He, too, advocated the development of analytical skills to enable students to form a critical consciousness which, in turn, will enable them to become responsible participants in society and agents of transformation.

In speaking about science, values, and national development, Dr. Roger Posadas summed up his basic theme in the statement "scientific progress affects human values and, at the same time, is affected by human values." He developed this theme through a discussion of the values intrinsic to science and the Filipino values unfavorable to science. His plea was for the inculcation of such values as national self-reliance, standards of excellence, originality and innovativeness, and a scientific and humanistic culture.

As the final speakers, Prof. Fernandez and Dr. Aquino reflected on the anchor role of the humanities in the preservation and promotion of human values. Prof. Fernandez stressed the role of the humanities in teaching the *Who* and *Why* of man rather than the *What*, the role of the humanities teacher as a value-carrier and a value-sharer. If poor teaching is a sin in any discipline, it is mortal sin in the teaching of the humanities. Prof. Fernandez, in her discussion of world literature, pointed out that the humanities are the repository of man's best works of the imagination and of our most cherished values. As such, they should be treated with

respect, if not with reverence. In teaching the humanities then, the humanities teacher cannot — or should not — indulge in ego-tripping, rugged individualism, or glib-tongued lecturing. Neither can the curriculum makers give into the temptation to minimize the role of the humanities in favor of science and technology, for to preserve the humanities is to preserve the values that make us human and humane.

So, what can we say is the significance of the APCAS Conference of 1984? Nothing was really new, considering that the values which it was concerned with are ages old, considering that moral development is part and parcel of the education process, as pointed out in Fr. Bonoan's paper. If we are speaking of something new, the only "news" was the announcement of Minister Laya that the MECS had finally approved the APCAS-sponsored revised curriculum for Schools of Arts and Sciences. But this is beside the point. The APCAS Conference was truly significant and important. By the very choice of its theme, APCAS reminded the nation — particularly educators and educational institutions — that the remedy for the present situation, the success of the moral revolution lies, to a great extent, in education with its recognition of and respect for those values and actions which humanize.

To sum up, the APCAS National Conference has made a valuable contribution to Philippine society at this time. Certainly it gave renewed inspiration to educators by its emphasis on their role as value-transmitters, value-carriers, and value-sharers. It gave words of caution that their very choice of subject matter, of methodology, of teaching strategies bespeaks their own value orientation. It delivered its message that this educational association, among others, recognizes and accepts the responsibility of carrying on and revitalizing the tradition of values formation and moral development for a renewed society.