

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Leadership and Nationalism: A Historian's View

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 19, no. 4 (1971): 725–730

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Notes and Comment

Leadership and Nationalism: A Historian's View

JOSE S. ARCILLA

National leadership is usually associated with government or political action. The concept, however, is much broader than that. It is an analogous term, and, if we are to appreciate its meaning, we need to explore its various nuances.

Significantly, the synonyms of leader—chief, head, guide, director, chairman—give a more vivid picture of what the word stands for. The philologist tells us that the word “chief” was a corruption of the Latin *caput*, head. And, although there are several ways of saying it, the leader is one who, like the head, stands above the rest. He sums up in himself the qualities which the others do not have. The head has eyes, just as the leader has vision. The head has a mouth; the leader is the spokesman. The head has a nose for smelling, ears for hearing; even so, the leader knows more and hears more than the followers. The leader is the best. And, not only can he effect whatever he pleases; he can also make others do what he wants. The leader gets things done.

There are some who say that the first national leaders of the Philippines were the *datu*s of the pre-Spanish *barangays*. This unfortunately labors under two difficulties. First, not much is really known of the pre-Hispanic islands to be able to say what the *datu*'s role was. Second, such a statement implies that there had already been a nation before the Europeans came. Historical evidence does not warrant this conclusion.

Would it be right to say that the Spanish missionaries were leaders of our country? There is much to be said for this opinion. They had come to preach the Christian Gospel, but their work embraced an en-

tire program of social development or liberation. They cleared forests, taught the people how to fence farms and plant crops, build irrigation dykes and canals, construct roads and bridges. They brought the Roman alphabet, opened schools, structured the native political leadership and, with the Christian norms of discipline, stabilized unwritten customs into written laws. More importantly, they gathered the people into towns and provinces, educated them in social interchange and introduced them to the western heritage of human wisdom and learning. With the versatility of the human spirit, our forefathers soon learned to think somehow like Plato and Augustine, dream and hope like Virgil or Dante, speak and write like Cicero or Cervantes.

Leadership demands vision, that is, the leader must plan. That is what we find in the missionary endeavor to Christianize our people. To them, the work of Christianization was a work of acculturation, although, being children of their age, it was always "for the service of God and the King." The story is well known, how the royal councilors had wanted to abandon the Philippines because it was a financial loss to the crown. But King Philip II of Spain (1556-1598), born and bred in a country where Catholicism was the very air one breathed, replied that he would rather sell the royal jewelry than abandon the new colony as long as one soul was baptized and saved from hell.

A dream of utopia? Maybe not; for when the British invaded Manila in 1762, and the northern provinces of Luzon rose in arms against the Spanish government, it was the missionary who calmed the excited feelings of the people. Palaris, who led the Pangasinan uprising, soon found himself alone, deserted by his companions and betrayed to the authorities by his own sister. In that moment of crisis, after two hundred years of Spanish rule, the people listened rather to the Dominicans who castigated their "disobedience and sin of rebellion," while urging them to accept once more the authority of the king who, under God, was charged in conscience with their welfare. The missionaries had carried out their plan of creating a Christian society whose first loyalty was to God, but, in keeping with the times, was under the temporal control of the King. It is here that we detect a fatal flaw in the colonial policy of Spain.

The external, material resources to spread God's Kingdom depended on the benevolence of the Crown, for which extensive privileges had been granted in return. Called the Spanish *Patronato Real*, its most serious effect was to undermine the very plan which the Spaniards had set out to implement. If their main purpose was to plant Christianity in the Philippines, a basic program should have been the development of the native clergy. We all know that in three hundred years of Spanish missionary work, very few native Filipinos were ordained to the priesthood. The sad experience of South America, where the first na-

tive priests had been a scandalous failure, considerably dampened enthusiasm here and held back the authorities lest the same mistakes be repeated. Why is this significant? Because in that period when the priest was the center of life and everyday action in the Philippines, the native Filipino priest who came from the people, ate their food, spoke their language and shared their feelings, could have served as the anchor of their development. That is why, when Father Pedro Peláez or Father José Burgos finally appeared late in Philippine history, they immediately became the leaders of a people gradually uniting into a nation.

We are not yet in possession of all that Father Burgos has written. Many of the writings attributed to him, like the novel *La loba negra*, were not from his pen, but were forgeries probably by José E. Marco. We are also not sure just what role Father Burgos had in the Cavite mutiny of 1872. We therefore must be very careful of undue hero worship, since his execution was rushed by a panicky government headed by a Freemason. But it is true that he was a leader in his time. His death changed the course of Philippine history, best described in the words of a young Ateneo student then: "Without 1872, there would today be no Plaridel or Jaena or Sanciango, and those brave and generous colonies of Filipinos in Europe would not exist. Without 1872 Rizal would today be a Jesuit and instead of writing the *Noli me tangere* would have written something quite different." (Rizal to Ponce, 18 April 1889: *Epistolario Rizalino* [ed. Kalaw], II, 166).

What does all this mean? Leadership is essentially the realization of ideals. It was tragic for the Philippines that, at the moment when anti-clerical liberalism or secularist nationalism was pervading the world, Filipino leadership which had found a voice in the priest was suddenly silenced and lost its vigor. Into the vacuum created by the death of Burgos stepped a new generation of leaders filled with different ideas of progress. Their campaign for reforms for the Philippines was not without hatred for what was believed to be the root of suffering in their country. Del Pilar and Rizal typified two different approaches, the first, offering the simplistic and negative solution of expelling the friars; the second, suggesting a more positive but more demanding program of parallel reforms among the Spaniards and the Filipinos, concretely specified in his aborted *Liga Filipina*. Hardly had the Liga been organized when its founder was exiled to Dapitan and, for the second time, the growing Filipino nation was deprived of a focal point for action. Rizal in exile was still a rallying point of the Filipinos, but leadership had been taken over by another man, the self-instructed Andres Bonifacio.

Bonifacio was not a schooled man. He founded the *Katipunan* aimed at the violent overthrow of the government. But we must not overlook the other association which had tried to keep alive Rizal's pro-

gram, the *Cuerpo de Compromisarios*. Many of its members were Rizal's friends, educated and rather wary of armed revolution. But when the Katipunan was discovered, the first victims of government repression were that select group of young scholars, the future Filipino intelligentsia. At a critical juncture of its history, the country lost its potential leaders, the intellectuals, the "fair hope of the fatherland." Were it not for the steady hand of Aguinaldo and his adviser Mabini, there would have been no Malolos Convention, no Malolos Constitution, where, for the first time in their history, the Filipinos could call themselves a nation, "whose state is called the Philippine Republic." (Title 1, Article 1, *Malolos Constitution*).

But it was not to be. Sovereignty was soon exercised by a new master. The Americans came and promised the Filipinos good government and independence, if they should show they were able to rule themselves. And the Filipinos proved to be capable students. Quezon, Osmeña, Recto, Laurel, to name only a few, convinced the Americans that the Filipinos were capable of standing on their own feet — politically! For, in culture, in economy and in education, the fledgling Filipino nation could not identify what it could call its own. In our efforts to be free, political independence became the main, almost exclusive concern of the leaders of the people. The best minds of our country were legal scholars and politicians. Their efforts won for us our independence — politically. And in 1946, amid the ruins of the Japanese war, the first Asian nation to win independent status was the Philippines.

Let me now offer some reflections. A leader must have four qualities: the ability to plan, the will to decide, the sense of responsibility, and the energy to carry through a decision. It is not enough to plan; one must come to a decision. There are too many Filipinos who have bright plans, both good and bad; for that reason, they may have to be institutionalized in Mandaluyong! Neither does it suffice merely to decide. One must be responsible for the decision and not blame others in case it proves to be wrong. And, finally, one must have the strength to follow through to its completion the adopted plan of action. Behind all this lies an inspiration. For, just as the love for a woman brings out the best in a man, so also it is an ideal that energizes a leader into action. A man in love leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife for they are "no longer two but one flesh." Similarly, the leader dedicates himself and sets aside everything else in the pursuit of an inspiration.

This is where we have to be brutally honest with ourselves. What has been the national inspiration of the Philippines? What has been the ideal of our leaders? Perhaps, because we are a young nation, there has been only one national dream — independence. Under the Spanish and American governments, our dream, as soon as we learned what

it meant, was independence. Now that we are independent, our dream is still summed up in that word, independence. For, while in the past we wanted independence from foreign rule, in the present we want independence from a tyranny that makes our democracy a farce.

Is there anything wrong with this? Nothing, except that we seem to forget that the Philippines is not politics. In our short existence as a sovereign republic, our attention has been concentrated on how to run a good government and the prominent figures of our society have so far been the political leaders. Life, however, is much more complex than politics. If we look back in history, we find that it was not the politicians who ushered Germany into greatness, but the scholars and researchers into German history who identified the old traditions they summed up as *Germanitas* and which became the basis of German unity and nationalism. It was the poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) who perfected an Italian dialect into a language when he wrote his *Divina Commedia* and gave the individualistic Italians a reason and basis for their loyalty to the nation or city-state. And long before these men, when the Huns of Attila thundered westward across the Roman Empire, it was not the Roman legion that saved western civilization, but the Christian monk in the monastic *scriptorium* who transcribed and preserved on parchment the treasures of human learning. For society is nourished by its ideas. It dies when it has served its purpose and its inner vitality is gone. Corruption seeps in and even without external violence, like a foreign invasion, it will succumb to an inner counterforce. The society of Burgos and Rizal is gone. The Philippines of Quezon and Recto is gone. We are faced by a country that does not seem to have a face, a dreamless, visionless society that seeks to cover its emptiness by a narrow xenophobia masquerading as nationalism. Where are our scholars who will identify our past, with all the traditions that have formed the Filipino soul? Where is our music? Where is our poetry? Where is the Filipino historian who can look back without rancor and not accuse the centuries under Spain and America, as though they were a plague that brought nothing but evil? We cannot build a society on hatred. We cannot build our lives by blaming others, and we must learn to distinguish between historical regret and present recrimination. We must be more positive. We must have an ideal, a plan of action.

Political parties, it is said, are necessary to democracy. But in the twenty-five years that we have been a democratic state, we have not yet had true political parties. Elections have been won on the basis, not of issues, but of personalities. Candidates have been elected more because of the unsavory or negative record of their opponent, and less because of their specific legislative programs. In other words, national loyalties are directed to persons, not to principles. Civil Service laws, for example, demand that positions be filled up according to merit and qualification. Are they followed in our society? How often do we read of pro-

motions because of political connections? How often do we learn of political appointees? Are we a kingdom or a republic? Is our government run by laws—or ideals—or by personalities?

This is the crisis we face today. It has been called a crisis in leadership. It is perhaps much deeper than that. Philippine society, strengthened by Spanish Christianity and governed through an American form of democracy, has not yet coalesced into a unity. Some beginning had been made late in the nineteenth century, when the first native intellectuals, like Rizal or Mabini, appeared. But they were not allowed to finish their work and others took their place. And today, in the words of a sociologist, the Philippines "remains an unfinished society. Unfinished in the sense that many tribal and other minority groups . . . have yet to find an accepted place in it. Unfinished in the sense that its institutions are still taking shape; painfully the search goes on for social forms which will be adopted to the genius of, and meet the needs of, the Philippine people." (Anon, *The Philippines. The Church In An Unfinished Society*, p. 57). It is here that national leadership faces the most exacting test. What kind of state is best suited for the Filipino temperament? What is it that our people really want as a nation? Unless an answer is found, unless a vision is formed of the country's future, the Philippines will scarcely advance beyond the mediocrity of the present situation.