

OPINION & FEATURES



Nurturing our own

AMIDST the political turmoil and outrage caused by the now infamous constituent assembly, amid the chaos being caused by the onset of the presidential campaigns, representatives from various sectors in the Philippines converged in Boston, Massachusetts for the 2024 Gawad Kalinga Global Summit 2009. The summit ran from June 12 -14, working towards a single-minded and altruistic goal – “A World Without Poverty.”

Prominent figures as Vice-President Noli de Castro, *Philippine Daily Inquirer's* Conrad de Quiros, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, GK Champion Tony Meloto and GK Builder Dylan Wilk took time from their hectic schedule to discuss possible solutions to fight the never-ending battle against poverty in the Philippines.

Even Cambridge Vice-Mayor Sam Snyder, in behalf of the City of Cambridge, gave his full support.

“The City of Cambridge supports the GK global summit to unveil the GK vision of 2024 of poverty eradication. What a noble goal that is, to discuss and think about it and chat strategies on how to do it. The two countries (Philippines and US) have a special relationship. There are 3 million Filipino-Americans residing in the United States, about 100 percent of them are gainfully employed. They participate in all facets of American life and strengthen the bond between our countries. I believe that sponsoring this kind of activity livens our community and creates avenues for a better world,” Snyder said in an article from Philstar.com.

“We launch GK as a global movement, to bring Filipinos out of poverty, slum after slum, town after town.

EDITORIAL

Based on our experience, it is possible that we can get the Philippines out of Third World without having to depend on foreign aid, depend on too much funding, we have the land, resources and talent,” said GK Champion Tony Meloto from the same article, urging Fil-Ams to contribute to the effort.

“The difference between a rich and poor country is the citizens’ love for the country. If we love our country, we will bring it out of the Third World even before 2024. We believe by 2010, we can do that because of our partners, our target now is to get land for 5 million families by 2024,” he further said.

An impossible feat, it may seem, especially since Fil-Ams are going through tough times with the economic recession as well. If we think about the miracle of the five loaves and two fish that fed a multitude in the Bible, we would probably come to an unlikely yet valid conclusion – the real miracle came from those who willingly shared what little they had – an act that turned meagerness into a veritable feast. (*AJPress*)

On being Filipino

THE awareness of being Filipino does not come naturally. We may be surrounded by all the symbols of nationhood—the flag, monuments, maps, pictures of our national heroes and the historic events in which they figured—but, though these may conjure stirring images of the nation, they do not necessarily bind us to the nation. We may sing the national anthem and recite the pledge of allegiance every day, but these do not automatically evoke in us a consciousness of being part of the nation.

To be part of the nation is to care about what happens to it. It is to see our personal lives as inextricably linked to its successes and failures. This identification allows us not only to share in the glory of the nation’s achievements, but also to feel accountable for its ruin. Otto Bauer, the Austrian social democrat, put it this way: “When I become aware that I belong to a nation, I realize that a close community of character ties me to it, that its destiny forms me and its culture defines me, that it is an effective force in my character.”

A national identity is one of many affiliations into which we are involuntarily thrown in the course of our lives. Some of these affiliations become salient to us insofar as we acknowledge and weave them into our own personal narratives. The nation penetrates our consciousness by producing consequences in the way we think, feel or act, and, indeed, in how others treat us.

A Filipino may see his identity as both an asset and a liability. If our country is at war, the government may call on every Filipino to defend the nation, and our conscience may prompt us to come to its defense as a matter of duty. At immigration counters abroad, we may be rudely awakened to the fact of our Filipino identity when we are made to step aside for a closer scrutiny of our travel documents. In foreign lands, we may find solidarity and security in the bosom of fellow Filipinos. But others may experience embarrassment in their company. When the country is praised or criticized by foreigners, or when a Filipino is singled out for adulation or ridicule by the rest of the world, we may grow in self-esteem or wither in shame. Either way, our consciousness of being Filipino is sharpened.

Filipinos did not always imagine themselves as a distinct people. This realization was a very slow process. It came as a function of their historic struggle against colonial oppression. Outside their own families, our ancestors tended to think of themselves as belonging to small tribal or ethno-linguistic groups. Under Spanish colonialism, they thought of themselves as children of the Church, or as subjects of Mother Spain. When they resisted Spanish oppression, they did so initially as separate communities. These



PUBLIC LIVES

Randy David

isolated revolts began to fuse into a national uprising only with the rise of the Katipunan. The colonial powers were aware of the divisions among them and fully exploited them.

The thinkers of the Philippine revolution believed that the struggle against colonial domination could not be won unless the Filipinos learned to think of themselves as one nation. Thus, the ideological task of the anti-colonial war focused on the creation of a strong Filipino identity—a positive consciousness and acceptance of the responsibilities of being Filipino. Apolinario Mabini’s work *The True Decalogue* was a tool that was explicitly developed to prepare Filipinos for nationhood.

Here is an abridged version of Mabini’s *Ten Commandments for the Filipino*:

I. Love God and value your honor above all things, for God is the source of all truth and justice, and your honor is what commands you to be truthful, just and industrious.

II. Worship God according to your conscience, for God speaks through your conscience.

III. Develop your God-given talents always according to what is right and just, for by doing so you contribute to humanity and you honor God.

IV. Love your country more than yourself, for this is the patrimony of your race, and the hope that you will bequeath to your children.

V. Put your country’s well-being before your own, for its happiness will likewise be yours and your family’s as well.

VI. Strive for your country’s independence, for only you can have any real interest in its advancement, and your own liberty depends on its being free.

VII. Do not recognize in your country the authority of any person whom the people have not elected, for authority comes from God and God speaks through the conscience of every man.

VIII. Build a republic, never a monarchy, for a republic makes a people noble and worthy, while a monarchy exalts only one or a few families and builds a dynasty.

IX. Love your neighbor as yourself, for this is a sacred duty that God imposes on both of you.

X. Treat your countryman as more than your neighbor, and see in him a friend, brother, or comrade with whom you are bound by one fate, the same joys and sorrows, and common aspirations.

To revisit Mabini’s Decalogue today is not only to see how the imagination of this great thinker was so far ahead of its time. It is also to realize how incomplete the project of the Filipino nation remains 111 years after Emilio Aguinaldo declared Philippine Independence. (*Inquirer.net*)

Rich man, poor man

BY the time this comes out, I’ll be in the US, having just attended the Gawad Kalinga Global Summit in Boston. Meanwhile I’ve got a couple of pieces to share with you. The first is something I wrote for Tony Meloto’s book on the story of GK. Tony deserves every bit of the effusive praise. The second is the Rizal Lecture I delivered before the Philippine Medical Association last month. Lest you miss me too much.

IN 1998, a 12-year-old girl named Josephine faced the presidential candidates during the presidential debate. She was the *Mang Pandoy* of that year’s elections. The debate, which really offered more of an opportunity for the candidates to orate than to debate, began with Josephine telling her story.

Josephine was an elementary school pupil who lived beside the mountain of garbage in Payatas. The third of seven children by a construction worker and a housewife, Josephine trekked several kilometers to and from school every day, wounding her way through the tambakan. Every day as well, after she packed up her textbooks, she picked through the refuse looking for scraps to sell. Plastics and wires particularly fetched good money. On a good day, she was able

to earn P100, which helped to put food on their table.

The candidates were then asked what they would do for her if they became president. Without hesitation, the candidates promised all sorts of things to pluck Josephine from her abject lot.

No one said he or she was speechless before this wisp of a girl who had just given them an awe-inspiring demonstration of the indomitability of the human spirit. No one said he or she had no advice to impart to this girl, given that she in fact had just given them a lesson in keeping dignity amid adversity, in showing courage in the din of battle.

If the same presidential debate were held today, I know one person who would answer in that very way.

Unfortunately he is not a candidate. He is a simple man. He is a poor man. He is a rich man.

He is Tony Meloto. The rich, F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, are different from you and me. By which he meant that the rich do not just have more money than we do, the rich have more eccentricities than we do. Eccentricities born of different sensibilities, different mindsets, different ways of doing things.



THERES THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

These are differences that often boggle our minds, used as we are to other ways, other needs, other lives. It takes imagination to understand the rich.

I’ve always thought the same thing was true of the poor. The poor are different from you and me. They do not just have less money than we do, they have a sense of lesser possibilities than we do. A sense of lesser possibilities internalized from different adversities, different deprivations, different levels of powerlessness. These are differences that boggle the mind, particularly when you see 12 people trying to fit into a hovel little bigger than a confessional, when you see a man poison himself, his wife and his six kids to spare them the pangs of hunger. It takes imagination to understand the poor.

Tony has that imagination. Tony is the one person I know who has truly listened to the poor. Tony is the person I know who has truly done something for the poor.

He has done so without calling attention to it. It is others who have called attention to it, refusing to let virtue go unnoticed. It is others who

have spoken about how Tony would take the bus to his appointments, counting his coins to pay for the bus fare like the rest of us bedraggled commuters of a bedraggled city.

His reasoning is as simple as it is forceful, brimming with a truth everyone who has poured himself into the thick of the *masa* knows: You do not live the life of the poor, you will not understand the poor. You do not live the life of the poor, you will not do something for the poor.

It is the easiest thing to say you are pro-poor or you listen to the poor. That’s what the candidates in the 1998 elections told Josephine then. And that’s what the candidates tell Josephine today. It is the hardest thing in the world to actually do it.

The difficulty does not just lie in the will or intention to deceive. The difficulty, even for the well-intentioned, also lies in the wit or vision to know how to. That is to say, it’s not just that people do not listen to the poor because they do not want to, it is also that people do not listen to the poor because they do not know how to. Listening is the hardest art of all to master. Listening to the poor even more so.

We do not lack for populists or

demagogues who do so.

We do not lack for candidates who sing and dance on the stage because they think that is all the poor know, that is all the poor want. We do not lack for Erap-types, including Erap himself, who can eat with their hands in some hovel in the slums but who can bury those same hands in the cookie jar, or the national treasury, without pausing to think that quite literally that is a case of what one hand giveth, the other taketh away.

We do not lack for self-proclaimed prophets who gather the poor unto their bosom, inveigling them to give all that they have, whatever they give will come back to them tenfold, without bothering to explain why if that were so they themselves like only to receive and not give. We do not lack for television hosts who lavish the poor with princely sums while making old women and ragged men run through hoops, who give the rest of the teeming poor to hope they too can find deliverance in luck and gratuity, if only they would brave stampedes from crowds that wind around them like snakes.

All of them talk to the poor. But all of them leave the poor poorer than when they found them. (*Inquirer.net*)



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