

The Goals of True Education*

by

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Neither education nor any other community enterprise will ever be meaningful and rewarding unless its goals and objectives are understood and supported by those who are engaged in it, be they students or teachers, or janitors or administrators, lowly citizens or high government officials. Without any sense of purpose, all our strivings are, to say the least, a great waste of resources. In fact, the worst consequence that can befall a nation can be triggered by aimless community endeavor: the collapse of a nation for lack of inner strength.

When we speak of "deeper commitment to the new society," it is

assumed that we all hope to see a transformation inspired by godliness to gladden the human spirit. It is also assumed that we are all for it and simply ask how we, as teachers or town officials, can participate in the steady and full realization of our hopes for our people.

So it is necessary that we ask questions about our conduct of community life. I think it will not be amiss, if, for the present, we speak only in terms of education, as an example of what we can aim to do. Then we can think of how the basic principles can be made to apply in other community responsibilities.

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In the context of national aspirations, what do we want of education? We would want it to encourage the learner to be concerned about the quality of life of man and nation. We would want education to teach the living of the good life as a worthy goal for everybody. Then you may ask, "If it is to be the goal of education, this good life, what is it like?"

The Middle East, which has come to prominence in recent years because it has become the bone of contention among the world's greatest powers, has also a lesson for us regarding styles of living. We who are so eager to establish our own identity, who are so earnest about turning our backs to an old way of life that held no enchantment for the greater mass of our people, who fondly hope that there is something more meaningful and rewarding in the future of a reformed society we need to dip into the histories of nations to seek guidance as we strike out in new directions.

Fortunately for us who call ourselves Christians, some of the most profound observations about life and living are conveniently put within our reach in the Bible. The land of the people some of whose prophets and leaders wrote the books that now compose the Bible is the Middle Eastern nation of Palestine. Palestine, unlike our land, contains within its tiny territory

deserts as well as fertile plains. It is easy to surmise that it must have its own share of the very rich as well as of the very poor. Its great kings and prophets and philosophers must have ample evidence of what would constitute the good life. One of the wisest of them all, the widely-acclaimed King Solomon, who knew what it was to have glory, made this observation about what he did with his own life:

"I searched with my mind how to cheer my body with wine — my mind still guiding me with wisdom — and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces; got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, man's delight.

"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes

desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun."

(Ecclesiastes 2:3-11)

King Solomon's disillusionment with the worldly version of the good life is echoed in the despair of a modern tragic figure who typifies many of us. Of this man, Richard Cory by name, the poet E. A. Robinson writes:

Richard Cory

*Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.*

*And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good morning," and he glittered when he walked.*

*And he was rich — yes, richer than a king —
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.*

*So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.*

So we may envy the kingly and the wealthy, but human history does not say that the most fulfilled are

those who possess the most of the world's goods. The powerful and the rich also are happy because they have something more, in addition to power and wealth.

Who knows what it is to have the good life?

The first that comes to my mind is the proverbial poor man who lived by the wall around a rich man's house and had only rice for his meals. If we remember the story, he grew stout from enjoying the aroma of the rich man's food while he was eating his rice. He appreciated what he could get and had no envy for those who happened to have more. On the other hand, the rich man suffered from ill health in spite of so much food set before him just because he could not seem to enjoy it.

We also know that we admire many heroes and heroines not because they were clever in saving themselves and in enriching themselves, but because they willingly spent themselves in the hopes of saving others. Even modern economists advise against measuring a nation's well-being in terms of the gross national product, the so called GNP. They explain that the favorable balance between national expenditure and production is not necessarily the true measure of a nation's progressiveness and health. The Philippine experience is a good case in point. We once were told that

about 95% of the nation's wealth went into the pockets of a mere 5% of the total population. The negligible 5% of the total national wealth was shared by 95% of the people. This disproportionate distribution of the nation's wealth only tended to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer. This state of affairs, as we all know, did not produce peace, rest, and progress. It was an ill that bred other ills. Even today, the picture is not yet very good. Fully one fourth of our total wealth is still in the hands of only 6% of the population; three-fourths of the total wealth belongs to only one fourth of the people. Almost seventy-five per cent of the people have only one fourth of the nation's goods.

Indeed, the gross national product is the symbol of materialistic objectives; it does not reflect the degree of enjoyment derived by the people from economic activity. It is evident that our national economic gains have not made us much happier. If anything at all, they have only made us wish to enjoy the style of life of other peoples of other climes, regardless of whether the imported life style is appropriate to our situation, of whether we can afford the life style or not. Education has not quite succeeded in developing in our people the ability to withstand pressure.

There are four other desirable qualities that education has not quite succeeded in developing among our people. First, the creativity that fashions workable philosophies from information taken from many sources; second, the self-reliance that confidently carries man and nation through times of difficulty and danger; third, the desire to be one's best self as far as one has capacity to express that self; and fourth, a sense of responsibility for the welfare of our community and nation.

Already we have commented on our imitativeness of others, sometimes far in excess of our capacity to support the imitated way of life. This desire to keep up with the Joneses is one of the saddest examples of our inability to stand up against outside pressure:

Instead of slavish imitation, what should happen to us should be some counterpart of the Japanese experience. I refer to the utilizing of our creative powers to transmute something that we admire — and even covet — in others into something of value to the Filipino. To go back to the Japanese, we all cannot help noticing that since after World War II the Japanese have stopped making cheap imitations of other people's popular goods. They are still making what other people have already been making: cars, watches, cameras, electronic equip-

ment — you name it, they make it. The admirable thing now is that they give a distinctly Japanese character to their products, which distinctiveness has become attractive to world markets. Having borrowed Western technology, they have fashioned one of their own of which they can be justly proud.

As to self-reliance, we Filipinos should dream of the day when we will not look to outside funding for every development program that we want to undertake. I do not mean to say that we should turn down voluntary aid given to us. What makes me unhappy is an instance when we cannot think up a good program unless some outside agency tells us we need to put up such a program, and that agency also has to give us the funds to use. Or, when we plan good programs, hoping that some outside agency will give us the money for it. The new society should be able to sense what is good for itself and, with clear-eyed vision, assemble its own resources to realize its objectives, however difficult the undertaking, however, many the calculated risks.

As to being one's best, or, as our pledge goes, **itong magmaging tunay na Pilipino sa isip, sa salita, at sa gawa**, we should take time to study and weigh the values that we hold. We must let go those questionable values that pull us down. The values that win us respectable recog-

nition we must cultivate to the end that, in the congress of peoples, others will be happy to be identified with a Filipino.

Also, a true citizen of the new society should not be an opportunist getting the most advantage from the community that sustains him but evading responsibility for its maintenance. Every citizen should support the functions of government. Paying taxes is therefore a necessity. For their own part, government personnel should earnestly strive to deserve the trust of the citizenry. The good life cannot be appreciated in a community where each one is there for what he can get and not for what he can share.

There is one other point I would like to stress about civic responsibility. One thing I have liked about American and Canadian public places is the evidence that they show of pride of public ownership. For the citizens of these countries, on the whole, are careful about how they use public facilities. They leave clean any place that they have used so that it is ready for the next users to enjoy. Everybody seems so grateful that his government had provided such enjoyable public parks and buildings that he takes personal responsibility, for their maintenance, although there are paid attendants to look for after the grounds. You and I know that

in the Philippines everybody's property is nobody's business, and there seems to be a pervasive spirit of not feeling guilty about dirtying or defacing public property for as long as one is not caught. This attitude has to be changed.

When education succeeds in turning out men and women with the maturity which we desire to see, we can bear to watch and admire the rich and fashionable Richard Corys of this world without envying them and rushing to engage in the questionable attempt to be like them. We can even pity such men, who have such good fortunes but cannot derive happiness from them. Then we can even acknowledge the superior advantages of other nations more favored than ourselves without thinking that we need to gain as much wealth and power as they have in order to be respectable and respected. Then we can begin to discover ourselves. Then we can begin to realize that the end of living is not so much in gathering things as in knowing what to do with what we have gathered; not so much in what others think of us as in what we do with our potentials and our responsibilities, especially when nobody is looking; not so much in the acclaim that we force from others as in what goodness we have generated among people whose lives touch ours.

The virtues which we have just recited are bred in and by wisdom. If education, therefore, can do nothing for us except to teach us how to gain wisdom, it shall have done enough. Now we can see that what is new about our present outlook is really a return to timeless virtues that we have laid aside since we first started running after passing attractions.

As we began, so we end. Let us follow wise King Solomon to summarize the issue for us in this manner:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding, for the gain from it is better than gain from silver and its profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you can desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantries, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold on her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion; let them not escape from your sight, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble. If you sit down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. (Proverbs:13-24)

Wisdom, and happiness through wisdom. For one and for all. What greater good can man and nation be committed to and strive for? What greater goals can educators have than to help realize these for our people? □