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That Marcos Foundation, January 31, 1970

MANUEL L. QUEZON III

That Marcos Foundation

By Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr.

A Free Press reader, the sportsman "Dindo" Gonzales, recently asked the editor why the magazine had not gone thoroughly into President Marcos' declaration that he would give away all his worldly possessions to the Filipino people. The editor called the reader's attention to the Free Press article, "Second Mandate," in the January 10 issue, in which the writer gave a satirical account of the Marcos inauguration as reelected President and the presidential renunciation of material wealth. But "Dindo" wanted more, and so, perhaps, do other Free Press readers.

Has the Free Press been remiss in the fulfillment of its journalistic duty? The editor himself has not given anything worth mentioning to the poor, hence his initial reluctance to look the Marcos gift horse too closely in the mouth, but the customer is always right, so here goes:

January 31, 1970—ON THE eve of his second inauguration as President of the Philippine Republic some Catholic bishops addressed a letter to Ferdinand Marcos:

"We are at a moment of our nation's history when we crucially need a charismatic leader, a deeply moral person whose honesty and integrity are beyond reproach, a President who will inspire us to be really one in action and national consciousness.

"We need a leader who will not tolerate graft and corruption, self-enrichment, vote-buying and goon-hiring which make a mockery of democracy, almost unlimited over-spending for campaigns, a real social crime especially in a country like ours.

"We need a deeply Christian leader who will be the moral conscience of our other political and economic leaders. And we ask you in the name of God to be such a leader."

They asked for the impossible—for an elected president who did not overspend for his election into office. Such a man, like the perennial candidate, Racuyal, will never make it because organizations like the Church do not support what they regards as crackpots.

Reacting to the bishops' letter, which is an indirect indictment of his first administration, President Marcos declared that he would give up all his wealth as an example that he hoped the affluent would try to emulate.

Soon thereafter *The Manila Chronicle* published interviews with persons from different sections of Philippine society on the presidential renunciation of wealth. The well-off were naturally skeptical. Like all people they projected their own selfishness and inability to conceive of their ever performing a generous deed onto the image of a man, who like them is also rich.

Speaker Laurel, whose political fate at that time was uncertain and depended on the President's whim, praised him. The President, he said, by his statement had set a standard of behavior which he hoped the nation would try to follow. Congress, he added, had already lived up to this standard in the past years, presumably the years of his leadership, and he hoped that it would continue to do so for many years to come. (That's a joke, son.)

Setting aside the hogwash, the representative from Cagayan, Benjamin Ligot said, "It would be hypocritical for a congressman who is not a millionaire to say that he is willing to give (his) allowances. We in Congress who are poor need the allowances." That, after all, is why people run for Congress: to alter for the better their financial condition.

How far the common people are from political cynicism is shown by the fact that, as the *Chronicle* interviews show, they do not dismiss the gesture out of hand.

The President's gesture may have no substance, they say; the future will show whether he means what he says or not. For the present, what is important is the gesture. That, they say, is better than nothing.

The President's renunciation of wealth is an indictment of the rich. It implies that to be rich in this society is to occupy an immoral position. No effort is made to correct anything unless it is thought to be wrong. The President's promise to give up all his riches reads like a resolution on rectification. The resolve to correct presupposes that one acknowledges an imperfection somewhere.

That the rich should finally begin to lose their complacency, their self-righteousness is some kind of improvement on the past. The gesture is what is important now; it is something that has happened. The substance of the gesture is for the future to praise or criticize.

A minority of those interviewed by the *Chronicle* dismissed the President's promise as "baloney." This society, one man said, is incapable of generating the liberal impulse in the breast of anyone living in it. It is ridiculous to compare Marcos to Mao, Ho Chi Minh or Gandhi. Their kind of selfless dedication is possible only among the new races that have been formed in the crucible of revolution and war.

The most cynical response came, of course, from the rich and their hired spokesmen in the press. If President Marcos is a rich man, then he is one of them. The rich know what they are. Being rich, it is not in them to give up any of their riches. And besides, how much of his riches will he give? Certainly, he cannot give away the hidden riches they attribute to him. That would be self-incriminating.

He can do it, of course. It's been done before. But he will have to retire to a monastery or go to jail. St. Francis and St. Augustine did it. One gave up a life of idleness and luxury, the other a life of profligacy. Both retired from society, from this world, to the city or to live simply and poorly he must live in a world where poverty is exalted at an ideal, otherwise he will be degrading himself. Monks, mystics and saints who lived in poverty did not in reality live in this world. Their bodies inhabited this world, but their egos lived in a transcendent realm. It is only in that other world—and China—that one who gives up all his material possessions can feel at home.

It is stupid to compare Marcos to St. Francis, as a *Manila Chronicle* columnist did. Marcos cannot give up all his wealth and live amongst us. He will be despised for his stupidity and for the alms he will have to beg for. If a man incapable of religious transport, an ordinary man, in short, gives up all he has and continues to live among those who place the highest value on material possessions, and thus brings on himself their contempt and mockery, he will even be greater than St. Francis.

Since he cannot really give up all his possessions, why then did Marcos promise to? His closest friends are rich. If he gives up all his wealth, he loses their respect and affection. Not because they are false friends, but because his life will then be incompatible with theirs. He will, in giving up his wealth, execute an act that is foreign to the nature of a rich man. Possessions are what make a man rich or poor. The rich have more of them, the poor have less. Take riches away from the rich and they are no longer rich but poor. Does Marcos want to alienate himself from the only circle of friends he really knows and with whom he feels most at home?

It was an unwise statement to make. No matter how much he gives up, it will never be enough to satisfy the skeptical, until he is actually seen wearing rags. If he had only said that he would start a foundation, what could be said against it?

Still something is better than nothing. It does put the rich on the spot. Will they also give? All? What if Marcos gives and they do not? And if Marcos does not give, what right will they have to criticize him? He will have proven himself to be no better and no worse than they are.

At any rate, the Free Press asked the President to make a clarification of his controversial statement if he cared to, and he did. Here it is:

"STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE PHILIPPINES FREE PRESS ON THE DECISION TO CREATE THE FERDINAND E. MARCOS FOUNDATION, INC. TO ENABLE THE PRESIDENT TO TRANSFER HIS MATERIAL POSSESSIONS TO THE FILIPINO PEOPLE.

"(This is intended as an answer to a query from the Philippines Free Press on the circumstances leading to the President's New Year's eve announcement which has met with high enthusiasm in many parts of the world, but with some skepticism among local critics. Authenticated by the Press Secretary, Mr. Francisco S. Tatad, Malacañang Press Office.)

"The decision to create the Ferdinand E. Marcos Foundation, Inc. was taken early in 1969. It was not an altogether easy decision to make, but once made, my wife and I agreed that whether I won or lost the election, the Foundation should be formed, to help in the advancement of education, science, technology and the arts.

"I asked a group of five men to study the plan. This was composed of Messrs. Juan Ponce Enrile, Geronimo Velasco, Cesar Virata, Cesar Zalamea, and Onofre D. Corpuz. They will now act as trustees of the Foundation on the basis of

official papers filed today, 22 January 1970, with the Securities and Exchange Commission, incorporating the Foundation.

"The corporation will take over the assets that I will transfer, and these assets will constitute the actual Foundation for educational, scientific, cultural and charitable purposes. As soon as the corporation is finally organized, and the assets to be transferred have been completely inventoried, the actual transfer shall be made through a deed of trust to be executed by me, with the conformity of the First Lady, my wife. The Foundation will hold title to the property, administer it and utilize its income according to its stated purposes.

"Announcement of the Foundation could have been made any time during the previous year; but it was a political year, and that mere fact alone could have been made the basis of much skepticism, questioning and ridicule. The Foundation would have been dismissed as pure political gimmickry, an attempt to buy votes. So I urged complete discretion on the part of the prospective trustees, and on my part, avoided the slightest reference to it.

"It was not until New Year's eve that I thought the announcement could be made. I felt then that it was opportune to make the announcement, having earlier, in my second Inaugural Address, called for new measures of self-sacrifice, and having glimpsed some kind of eagerness on the part of the public to respond to that appeal. I, therefore, issued the following statement:

" 'Moved by the strongest desire and the purest will to set the example of self-denial and self-sacrifice for all our people. I have today (31 December 1969) decided to give away all my worldly possessions so that they may serve the greater needs of the greater number of our people.

" 'I have therefore decided to give away, by a general instrument of transfer, all my material possessions to the Filipino people through a Foundation to be organized and to be known as the Ferdinand E. Marcos Foundation, Inc.

" 'It is my wish that these properties will be used in advancing the cause of education, science, technology and the arts.

" 'This act I undertake of my own free will, knowing that, having always been a simple man, my needs will always be lesser than the needs of many of our people, who have given me the highest honor within their gift, an honor shared by no other Filipino leader.

" 'Since about a year ago, I have asked some of my closest confidantes to study the mechanics of this decision. Today studies have been completed, and a Foundation will now be formed to administer these properties and all funds that may be generated therefrom.

" 'For the moment, my most sincere hope is that this humble act shall set the example, and move to greater deeds of unselfishness and compassion, many of our countrymen whose position in society gives them a stronger duty to minister to the needs of our less fortunate brothers and countrymen.'" (End of statement.)

"Since that announcement all sorts of questions have been asked, and many seem more concerned with the question of the Foundation's actual worth than with the fact that there is a foundation, and that through it the President will be able to transfer his material possessions to the Filipino people.

"Whereas, the law must determine what exact description of property I should be able to transfer to the Foundation, the transfer to the Foundation, the transfer contemplates 'all worldly possessions' which the law will allow. In time, the Foundation itself should be able to present an evaluation of its assets. But in the meantime, I believe it sufficient to say that the Foundation is there, or is going to be there, and that is really what matters."

What is one to believe?

After he had risen from the grave, Jesus appeared to his disciples. But Thomas, "called the Twin...was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord,' he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him:

"'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'"

Thus speaks the Gospel according to John, to which one can add no comment.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The question is, obviously, centered on the meaning of "all." Did the President really mean what he said about giving up ALL his worldly possessions? Under the law, he cannot give away his wife's half of the conjugal property. Half of all

that is acquired with earnings during the marriage belongs to each of the spouses for him or her to give away or keep.

And what is the "all" of the man whom the Liberals like to describe as "the richest man in Asia?"

The President, of course, did not have to give anything away at all. But if he did not mean what he said, why did he say it? From sheer demagoguery? Rashly—in panicky answer to the seven bishops' challenge to give the Filipino people a Christian government, something they never had?

If the President gave all his worldly possessions to the poor, he would be more Christian than the Catholic Church itself, which is holding on to its worldly possessions like nobody's business. Christ told the rich young man to give what he had to the poor and follow Him, but the Church charges interest when it lends. That's business. Why must Marcos do more?

The mocking judgment on the Marcos statement about giving up all he had to the Filipino people is a form of self-judgment. Catch anyone doing that! Who would give, not all but a substantial portion of his wealth to the poor? A certain amount, why not? It would be tax deductible and there is the publicity, but certainly not so much that it would hurt. And, of course, not all. That would be Christian, not to say communistic. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, Christ said, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Well, if one were rich, one would damn well rather go to hell. Right?

To be poor, let's face it, is awful. Only the rich romanticize about poverty.

Why did the President say he would give ALL his worldly possessions to the Filipino people? If he had said he would give some, nobody could have made an issue or a joke of it. Now, no matter how much he gives, it will not be enough.

"Is that all"? the question will be asked by those who do not give or hardly give anything at all.

Yet, something is better than nothing, indeed. If only he had not said "all"!

TAGS: BENJAMIN LIGOT, CATHOLIC CHURCH, CESAR VIRATA, CESAR ZALAMEA, DINDO GONZALEZ, FERDINAND E. MARCOS, FERDINAND E. MARCOS FOUNDATION INC., FRANCISCO S. TATAD, GANDHI, GERONIMO VELASCO, HO CHI MINH, JOSE B. LAUREL JR., JUAN PONCE ENRILE, LIBERAL PARTY, MANILA CHRONICLE, MAO ZEDONG, MARCOS FOUNDATION, ONOFRE D. CORPUZ, TEODORO L. LOCSIN JR.

BY MLQ3 IN ARTICLES ON JANUARY 31, 1970.

← SECOND MANDATE: JANUARY 10, 1970

THE JANUARY 26 CONFRONTATION: A HIGHLY PERSONAL ACCOUNT,
FEBRUARY 7, 1970 →

11 Comments



ricelander

JANUARY 31, 2006 AT 11:12 AM

REPLY

Regardless of our feelings about Marcos, we should inquire whatever happened to the Marcos Foundation. All along I thought it was just a fiction being peddled by loyalists until I read this article. Someone should ask Enrile or Virata or Imelda, and whoever else who could testify to its truth or falsity.



glecerio f. galolo

FEBRUARY 11, 2014 AT 6:28 AM

REPLY

Please have mercy on me, lease and kindly give me glocometer and 5 bottle of insulin 70/30. i ve been suffering diabetes for 13 years . Please send it at block 31- lot 16 kisanlu subd, iponan, cdoc

mr glecerio f, galolo



Jun Velasco

APRIL 22, 2016 AT 5:56 PM

REPLY

what about the 640,000 metric tons of Gold and the 30% commission got by Marcos and Diaz. Is that the possession of Marcos that he wants to give to the Filipino people



me

MAY 12, 2016 AT 8:06 AM

REPLY