Manila observatory blessing ceremonies scheduled today

By Josefina D. Constantino

The destruction of a city can be unnerving. I saw Manila razed to the ground; and it is a tribute to the resilience of its people that in six months time, they were housing themselves somehow and life was picking up a routine. I thought I had known the limits of destruction from the ashes and rubble of a city wantonly destroyed.

But very recently, when I saw the Manila Observatory out at Loyola Heights; when I saw the intricate network of precision instruments and highly sensitive equipment that have been so painstakingly constructed and assembled by the Jesuit scientists; when I realized that it took the fathers many long years after the destruction of the Manila Observatory to set up the Mirador Observatory in Baguio and start their regular daily supply of ionospheric and solar data to several scientific and research agencies in Europe, the United States, and Asia; when I realized that after another 10 years, the fathers had to work for the transfer of the observatory from Baguio to its permanent site at Loyola; and when I realized that not alone were buildings and equipment destroyed, but the work of minds that had applied themselves to the use of such equipment, and which work were recorded in documents collected for over 80 years and now lost—the faithful day-to-day observations and studies of the four great men of science (Fathers Faura, Algue, Selga, and Depperman) who had brought the Philippines into international knowledge through their Philippine data coverages—then I now know, indeed, what the deadliest violence of destruction is: a memory almost lost in the apathy and negligence of a people; a continuing mind reflected in works, now dented and injured; and a history never to be resurrected.

All could have been totally lost were it not for the ever-beginning, ever-offering dedication to increasing the frontiers of human knowledge made by persevering Jesuit scientists.

Traditional excellence

For something less tangible but more preciously enduring has been saved at least: the tradition of excellence in scientific research. This has been kept vibrant and vigorous because the Jesuit province in the Far East has contirued regularly to have their men trained in the sciences and to work for the highest degrees in fields that are in today's materialistic milieu, almost esoteric: doctorates in geophysics, basic physics, quantum physics, mathematics, and similar sciences from the Catholic University, MIT, John Hopkins, Columbia University, St. Louis University, Fordham, and Michigan.

On April 16, 1961, the cornerstone of what is now the Manila Observatory was blessed by Cardinal Santos. The five-hectare site at the first turn east of the Main Road, was then, veritably, the most depressing spot of the vast Loyola campus.

But by August 1962 when the community of five Jesuit priests had moved down to Loyola, three construction projects were well on the way to completion.

The main building designed by MIT alumnus Gines Rivera was to house the Jesuit community of meteorologists and geophysicists. It also was to house the radio physics offices and laboratories.

Another building, circular in shape, three stories high, and surrounded by a moat was to house the solar physics offices. It was all set to receive its unique spectroheliograph with its two-ton vacuum tank.

In another nook of the compound, 12 feet below ground level, an underground seismic vault 50 x 22 feet in dimension had solid adobe pieces that had been chiselled out of rock. The only installation that suffered delay in the construction schedule was the ionosonde station which needed a special size antennae almost half a kilometer in length. This therefore had to be situated out in Balara.

community for its transfer from Baguio to Diliman shall then be completed. Then the scientists can begin their quiet study again; and for us, it is time to reflect on many matters.

Paternalistic

Consider: Philippine society has long been called paternalistically oriented. People always look up to the government for their needs. Before, it was called sheer dependency; now certain of its aspects are sometimes called mendicancy.

Philippine public institutions draw their appropriation from the government. But private institutions have had to fend for themselves. An eloquent proof of this is that over 99 per cent of the educational budget goes to public schools and less than one per cent goes to private schools.

It is therefore understandable why a private scientific research center like the Manila Observatory has had to meet its own obligations only largely through the efforts of the Jesuit community in the Philippines and significantly with the invaluable financial assistance from research and scientific organizations abroad like the NASA, the US department of commerce, National Bureau of Standards, the US Coast nad Geodetic Survey, and similar agencies.

An ordinary Filipino citizen who fully appreciates the worth of scientific research and who is thereby