

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESSES**

### **ON THE RELIGIOUS BASES FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING**

**Datu Mama S. Sinsuat**

Before the turn of the century a seminar with the theme, "The Religious Bases for Muslim-Christian Understanding" would have been unthinkable. This year's seminar emphasizes the fact that Philippine society has become smaller in the sense that various communities have become more dependent upon each other. We cannot depend on outsiders in laying the bases for mutual understanding, we have to work these out among ourselves.

Hopefully, this seminar will come up with viable solutions to the current problem of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians in this part of our country. There may come up proposals for changing the attitude and orientation Muslims and Christians have toward each other.

The common goal of the two groups should be development and progress for the nation. This seminar is certainly towards this goal, as the two groups will now be brought close to each other in search of keys to understanding. Misunderstanding, in any form, among our people is a hindrance to national socio-economic progress.

Religion have much to contribute in the development of nationalism and in political uniting the people. But, first, the Christian must understand and know Islam and the Muslims must understand and know Christianity. That both may simultaneously discover, as surely as the day follows the night, that they could exist, complementing each other, within the 24 hours of each day. Difference should be left to theologians for their academic studies and discussions. Such should not be carried to the pulpits for emphasis, but, rather the pulpits should be used for the preaching of love and peace for all men.

In spite of the fact that the bases and origin of these two great religions is the same, certain beliefs and practices of peoples have fragmented the religious communalities into different sects. Hence, in a

country like the Philippines serious discrimination have been done against those in the religious minority that became disadvantaged in many aspects of community life, as well. Antagonism toward each other has kindled in many occasions hatred for each other. We have to break loose from these age-old religious prejudices which have become a major stumbling block to cooperation and complementation among religious groups in the community. We should now start reorienting our attitudes towards each other.

These are bases for the change in religious attitudes. The world is in constant change; society changes itself; to these changes, the religious people must be the first to understand and conform, or be the leaders.

The Philippine society is in the process of change. It has become imperative for the religious segments of our society to review and examine themselves and make the corresponding changes, too; otherwise, our transformation can not be completed and will be doomed to failure.

Religion and socio-economic development should go side by side. Nowhere is this more felt than in a country like ours which has been lagging behind other nations in development. Our economic progress and development will provide the necessary material needs of man to sustain a healthy life and spirit. A nation cannot grow, mature, develop and progress with people who are not economically and socially healthy.

There will be no progress and order in a society whose people spend more time in religious squabbles than on working for their material and social progress. Therefore, this seminar's aim at identifying the religious bases for Muslim-Christian understanding could not have been more timely. By accentuating these bases, unity will come about sooner.

Not all Muslims are good nor are all Christians bad. The good ones of each group should close ranks and together, in concerted action, work for the active participation and full utilization of human resources for the common good. Let no one be left out simply because he belongs to a certain religious community.

Socio-economic projects of the church should extend to all, regardless of their religious affiliation. This attitude can be cultivated through frequent informal and formal meetings among religious lay leaders. Apathy toward each other's religion will therefore be turned into understanding since there will naturally be interchanges of ideas, experiences and plans for development.

Local social values, ideals, traditions of each religion should be respected and possibly examined by the local churches and leaders for correct interpretation. Those found inadequate, antagonistic or irrele-

vant to the national aspiration for unity and understanding must be modified or played down, if not entirely discarded. Religious institutions must also be agents of change for progress and development. For this purpose, the pulpit, seminars, workshops, publications and projects may be equally shared without surrendering one's religious beliefs.

The contents of the Holy Bible and the Holy Qu'ran should be examined for their teachings on commerce, education, administration, social and political development. These teachings and mandates of God should be projected and exploited to the maximum and by so doing bring religion down to earth and hence, more meaningful for us, mortals.

Definitely, the bounties of mortal life are a God-given trust for our physical and spiritual well-being. Religion then should not be taken as an enemy of life, but rather should be exploited for the progress of mankind. Both Islam and Christianity emphasize perfect life in society. Both must unify within the context of the socio-economic system wherein they operate. We must thus seek solutions to our economic problems in the common teachings of both religions of which no doubt you will find many.

A current trend is for different culture groups to meet and intermingle in peaceful pursuits. This seminar is a healthy sigh. Here one get the orientation and guidance on how to consider and treat his brother of a different religion. From the scriptures, it is said that, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) and "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18).

Do these mandates not emphasize to us that God is primarily concerned with our conduct in this mortal life rather than the cults of religion? We are mandated to the brotherhood of a human society over and above brotherhood in religious groups. Through Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him), God has repeated the mandate thus, "None of you have faith in God until you love your brother as you love yourself."

Through the long years of their coexistence, the respective missions of both religions have not been presented to each other in a positive manner. Various historical circumstances through the centuries have spawned quarrels with each other. The Crusades left bitter memories and the feeling of distrust, and suspicion in the Muslim mind, hindering what could have been centuries of peaceful coexistence. Admittedly, Christian Filipinos have in many instances displayed their lack of understanding of the Muslim Filipinos' beliefs and practices.

Because of historical antecedents, Muslim Filipinos have through the centuries viewed the Christian mission as one of conversion. The

Christian mission should be publicly clarified by the Christians not only to Muslims but also to other Christians.

The edict of Pope Paul VI who, in union with the Council Fathers of Vatican II, defined the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church with non-Christians, including Muslims:

*Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Saviour to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, alms giving and fasting. Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have risen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom.*

In those areas identified by no less than His Holiness Pope Paul VI, to wit, "our common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom," may I exhort my countrymen of whatever religion to dedicate themselves to this common cause. Our effort toward these ends should have the fervor and spirit of what Prophet Mahammed said, "Work to achieve success in this world as if you are going to live forever and work to achieve success in the next world as if you are going to die tomorrow."

Man's next world is one where there are no man-drawn lines between race and believe. Should we not be together in peace and understanding in this world as we shall definitely be also as such together in the next world?

**DATU MAMA S. SINSUAT** is commissioner of the Commission on National Integration. He obtained his law degree (1952) from Far Eastern Univeristy in Manila and was admitted to the Philippine bar in 1953.