

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### PHILIPPINE ANTHROPOLOGY: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J.\*

UGAT. When I received the invitation to this conference, I was not quite sure what to be more intrigued by: the prospect of talking to a whole flock (or is it "pride"?) of anthropologists or the acronym, UGAT, of your organization. On the first – Prof. Bennagen proposed that I speak on "Philippine Anthropology: Challenges and Responses" but with freedom to develop *other topics* that I felt "more appropriate to the concerns of the Conference." To me that sounded like a covert invitation (more like a red flag, actually) to "subversion," always an intriguing subject. On the second – I couldn't quite decide whether to give the term *ugat* a Tagalog meaning, i.e., root, or a Cebuano-Bisayan one, i.e., vein, but later opted for the second simply because of its affinity to things bloody, also a most intriguing subject. *Bloody subversion* – how's that for a topic for discussion by an august and staid body like yours?

But seriously, I would like to take a look at the topic proposed and see if there is anything worthwhile saying about it. It lends itself easily to a simple division: I would like to talk first of *the problem* which I think underlies the topic, secondly of its *setting*, then of the *challenges* and *responses*, and end with *Philippine Anthropology* itself and our involvement.

#### THE PROBLEM

Two years ago, in October 1977, I happened to be in London when the English (Catholic) Church was commemorating the 10th anniversary of the issuance of Pope Paul VI's great encyclical on integral human development, *Populorum Progressio*, and I was invited by some friends to attend a symposium convened to discuss it. At this remove in time and space, there is not much I can remember about what was said, even though, like a good anthropologist, I was all eyes and ears for the Englishy nuances of the conduct of the meeting – if you ask me, I am not sure I was too successful along those lines either – but I do remember well the thrust of the message of the main speaker, Lady Jackson (Miss Barbara Ward), the eminent economist (I think she is an economist). She bewailed the fact that in the ten years since *Populorum Progressio* was issued, there had been no really new ideas in the Church on the social question.

---

\*Bishop of Bukidnon

In the discussion period that followed her talk, one gentleman from the audience took her up on her lament and pointed out that the dearth of new ideas could well be because not much had really been done about the germinal ideas espoused by the encyclical. His brief intervention was to the effect that for ideas to be developed, they have to be put into practice — unless one were to be satisfied with simply speculating about them, dissecting them intellectually into bits and pieces for narrower and narrower scrutiny. A rather sterile exercise. But when ideas are tested in action, they quickly assume a life of their own and evolve into variant versions of themselves, providing new insights, generating new dynamisms, and there is no lack of fresh ideas.

I wonder whether the same lament (Lady Jackson incidentally was in agreement with the gentleman's comments) can be made of anthropology in the Philippines, or anywhere else for that matter, today. There is an implied criticism here, I know, but before I ruffle too many scientific feathers, let me see if I can put it in less offending fashion.

### THE SETTING

The context of any anthropologizing today in the Philippines is, simply, *the Philippines today!* And this means martial law and our present system of laws (or non-laws), the whole paraphernalia of our peculiar system of government. Some friends, "enemies" too, say that no matter what I talk about, somehow I manage to drag in a jeremiad about martial law.

But I do insist, it does mean our "special" political structuring and all that comes of it. It means the hard economic condition of our people. It means rampant militarization; the Mindanao secessionist movement; the utter helplessness of our ethnic minorities; violence and threats of violence; land reform or better, its absence; development schemes that destroy rather than help people; the extreme vulnerability of our people in the face of their many unfreedoms. If these are only situational problems which someday the promised millennium will solve (and martial law is supposed to usher in that millennium), perhaps they are. But martial law or no martial law, there is the continuing problem of poverty, widespread, endemic, entrenched, and more than just quantifiable poverty, the institutionalized inequity of maldistribution of wealth and power.

I paint a black picture, I know. I also know I could just as well paint a rosy one. I could talk about the monumental patience of our people before all that bleakness, their quiet dignity in the face of indignity. I could talk about their enduring good sense, their saving humor. I could talk about their strength, their courage, though everything else about them is in a shambles. But somehow even such an optimistic reading will sound subversive, so I will cease and desist. Everyone here does have a different picture of the Phil-

ippine scene, some more gilt-edged, others greyer or blacker; some more balanced, others more biased. But however we paint it, I suggest we go beyond what I've just been doing — painting, that is, and start, well, doing something more, or at least, thinking of doing.

### THE CHALLENGES

In essence, what I am saying is simply this: something is happening to the very scene we anthropologize on — to its ruination, I'm afraid — and we should begin doing something before it gets irreparably ruined, before it disappears altogether.

This, to my mind, is the challenge of the day, urgent, pressing. It is a challenge not for anthropologists alone, true, but for all sectors of Philippine society. But general as the challenge is, the way it is addressed to you as anthropologists, and indeed as an association, has its own special character which also calls forth, I would think, a special response from you. But before we go on to that response, there are a few thorny premises — or questions, perhaps, depending on whether you have already made up your minds on them or not — that we have to look into first.

#### *The Science of Man*

We say anthropology is the study and science of man. I imagine no one will quarrel with that — except possibly non-anthropologists. The problem comes when we raise the question: Science of man for science's sake? Or science of man for man's sake? The first has a lofty ring to it. The second somehow sounds gross, utilitarian, prostituted. But that precisely is the question. And I would add: Why *that* seeming?

#### *Holistic Study*

We say anthropology is the science of the *whole* man and we pride ourselves on our holistic approach. But if the object of our study and approach is holistic, does this not mean the student himself, the anthropologist, must be holistic in all other ways? The point is: Can an anthropologist be thoroughly scientific, all objectivity, all intellectuality, and not allow other areas of his own *human*-ness to intrude into his study, to influence it, enrich it, for the holism he seeks and uses? Must his concerns be only scientific or also and especially integrally human and humane?

#### *Ethics of Research*

Anthropology (cultural, that is) has traditionally had a special predilection for "primitive" peoples. It bothers me no end that we have used these "primitives" simply as laboratories for our theorizings and speculations on the nature of man and his cultures, and little of our insights have gone back

to them for their own use, for their own greater "humanization." I believe this problem is germane to the one that agonizes social scientists who do research in Third World countries for publication in journals of prestige in the First World and are sorely exercised by the new form of colonialism (exploitation of Third World scientific resources for intellectual consumption elsewhere) that they are willy-nilly practicing.

### *Trickle-Down Theory*

We more often than not salve our consciences by convincing ourselves that sooner or later the wealth of our researching will seep down to the *hoi polloi*, the common people; our high lore will be translated for lesser mortals by intellectual middlemen — science-popularizers. Science for science's sake thus means our hard-earned *exotica* will eventually be for the good of people. This is the trickle-down theory of economic development in anthropological dress. That trickling down will probably take place. Probably not. But I fear the urgency and pace of change among "objects" of our anthropologizing negate the whole force of the theory (as it seems to have negated indeed in economic planning).

There probably are other questions we should ask. But let these suffice. They are not new and they have been addressed by anthropologists before, individually as well as collectively, even made topics of learned discussion, sometimes of acrimonious debate (cf. the whole controversy in the 30's and 40's about whether anthropology was a humanistic discipline or not). I do not intend to renew the quarrel by dredging up the same arguments and counter-arguments. Nor do I want your meeting to degenerate into an anthropological Plaza Miranda (we do miss those cantankerous forums) for the airing of political gripes against or defenses of martial law government and the present state of the nation. But I do strongly believe they are questions we must ask ourselves honestly — and answer to the best of our ability — before we can at all begin to think in terms of challenges and responses to them. When all is said and done, the basic challenge to us right now could well be for the need for more critical thinking, not in the sense of mere fault-finding but of discerning, of thinking things through to all their implications, in short, to use our patented term, holistic thinking.

### RESPONSES

I imagine the immediate response to the challenge posed is: let's have more research, wider, deeper; let's have more relevant studies; let's have more funding and more rationalized use of funding; let's have a think-tank of social scientists to sift through all the data of our studies; let's communicate the results of these studies to decision-makers, etc., etc. All well and good — these will, I know, be offered and discussed and refined in later sessions of this con-

ference. So let me underline something here which is specifically anthropological — the special contribution I spoke of earlier that we can bring to the general problematic of Philippine development. It is most commonplace, nothing new, but I believe, for that very reason, worth reiterating again and again.

I refer here to what I already said above: if the challenge is to holistic thinking, then our response will have to be precisely holistic thinking — even if we have to do so in fits and starts, most unholistically. In these days of strong ideological tensions, I do feel very strongly about what we matter-of-factly call the anthropologist's holistic approach to the study and culture of man. For it is not only a method of study. It is preeminently one of action too. And our failure may be in this, that we have not tested enough the implications of holism for actual action. Or if we have, we have not preached it enough — or followed through on the insights gained.

Some years back I attended a dinner for a doctoral candidate who had successfully passed his thesis examination for his Ph.D. at the University of Colorado. It was a most interesting gathering. The host was the thesis director of the candidate. The guests were mainly the candidate himself and the panel of examiners. And their conversation, carried far into the night was practically a continuation of the thesis defense held earlier in the day. The thesis had been about economic development in a Third World country and the candidate had made a rather forceful case for the usefulness and validity of such anthropological principles of change as are wont to be presented in scholarly and abstract fashion in the classroom. The professors were intrigued by the idea that they and their kind were after all useful to humanity at large. (I suspect that was exactly why they passed the examinee without any hesitation!)

One of the professors present that evening, a highly respected physical anthropologist of national standing, took the student aside at one point and asked him rather somberly: "Do you really believe yourself that those ideas on culture change and strategies will work?" Before he could get an answer, he went on to draw a pointed parallel between the control of big people over little people in the student's country of research and that held by big business and big government over the lives of ordinary people in his own, i.e., in America. He was quite skeptical. But he went on nonetheless to deplore the failure of the anthropological community to make their proper contribution to the resolving of what he saw as the hopeless situation in his country with regard to the equitable sharing of wealth and power. He spoke of the anthropological mentality, holism, and of its utter lack in the conduct of public affairs in America, in economic planning, in practically every phase of the nation's life.

Was he being utopian?

I don't believe so. There is such a thing as what he called "the anthropological mentality." We talk about it glibly when we discourse on our method, on holism, on the holistic approach. But if we were to be asked exactly what we mean by it, more, what we intend to do with it, I am afraid we would not by and large be able to give a good account of ourselves. In effect, what the professor was saying was: Can we bring the concept of holism, the approach, the philosophy, the etic — call it what you will — down to a level of discourse that will make it concrete and truly relevant, feasible, practicable? Environmentalists, that new breed of people whose ancestry is quite genuinely anthropological but who are often rejected as — pardon the term — bastards (in more sense than one) by mainline anthropology, are in a very real sense showing the way. They talk much of the interplay between the physical environment and the social — although sometimes they seem to emphasize too much the preservation of the physical world at the expense of the preservation of man himself. And they just don't talk. Could we inject into the picture, presupposing that we indeed want it whole, a concern for all manner of environments: physical, yes, but also political, economic, and social? This, put differently, is the challenge before us. And the very challenge determines our response — or should.

### PHILIPPINE ANTHROPOLOGY

I have been, frankly, out of anthropology these many years past and I must confess to being woefully out of touch with developments in the discipline both here and elsewhere. Hence, I readily admit I am not the best man to talk about Philippine Anthropology. But if I have lost contact with academe, I have not — so at least I like to deceive myself into thinking — with the stuff of which great anthropology is made: the people themselves, their hopes, their fears, their whole life in the here and now. And for them and their life, I see even an anthropology which to some of you possibly is hopelessly outdated to be most relevant indeed.

The unspoken criticism I hinted at earlier thus comes from what we see *down there* in the field, not from what you as academics are thinking and saying — and, yes, doing — *up there*.

For we do see what is happening to our people: The Chico River development project up north and how the Bontok and the Kalinga are responding; the Cellophil forest-grab in Abra and the Mountain Provinces and how the Tingguian and their neighbors are responding; the nuclear plant in Morong, Bataan; the squatter-relocation schemes in Metro Manila and other big cities (Cebu, Iloilo, Davao, etc.); the Kawasaki sintering plant in Cagayan de Oro, electrification and irrigation projects of all sorts in Bukidnon, Lanao, the Cotabatos; other equally ambitious development programs all over the country.

In all these, we see how our people, the most expendable among them especially, are responding — and suffering. And we look in vain for students of the science of man to be with the people, and few, if any, are there. Or should they be there at all? Perhaps the main challenge after all is the answering of those basic questions we posed above.

But whether you answer them or not, or however you answer them, I think you are missing a singular opportunity for scientific research by your absence. I agree any change in people and the way they live is grist for the anthropological mill and change can be studied as well at the end of as during the process. But if you as anthropologists do indeed have something to offer — that mentality or outlook that we have been talking about — I believe you must make your presence felt, not only in high places, among the computers and in the theorizings of technocrats — the *planners* — but in low places as well, among the people themselves — the *planned for* — where the final decisions must be taken, not so much to sway decisions one way or another — unless one way of deciding is patently more harmful to people than another — but to present data (and present them with a truly holistic outlook) which will lead to better and more humane decisions.

This role of anthropology is all the more necessary these days in the present government-by-fiat under which we live. The very attempt at controlling all processes of decision-making in the body-politic along predetermined lines makes the holistic approach all the more necessary, for, I take it, full, untrammled participation by people in the decision-making and decision-taking process is of the essence of that approach.

### PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT

If there is any validity to what I have said so far, then perhaps it is time we change our method of anthropological research and study from “participant observation” to something else — shall we call it “participant involvement”? I feel we have to go beyond mere participant observation which, pardon me for saying, somehow seems to me too antiseptic and, if I may add, quite narcissistic, geared more towards what the anthropologist can get out of people for *his* study than what people can get out of him. The latter, participant involvement, tautological as it sounds (which it is not), seems to fill the bill for that “beyond.” For if culture is a process and people are not simply objects of study, the anthropologist will have to be caught up in that process, interact with people at a basic human level, and whether he likes it or not, influence that process and the people he deals with for good or ill. My simple-minded thinking is: it should be for good.

I imagine this is scientific heresy to those of you who believe firmly that scholarly objectivity must not be tampered with under any pretext, even on the plea of a higher imperative like concern for the good of people (es-

pecially since we may not be agreed about what that *good* should be, much less about the ethical reasons and values that undergird that concern). Also, it may seem, I am mixing egregiously various levels of scientific abstraction in a manner that will confuse and hinder, not clarify and advance, the anthropological enterprise.

Be that as it may. I probably should plead guilty to all the charges and leave it at that. But the fact is when we take a holistic approach, when we test ideas using this approach, whether in research or in action, or even in sheer speculative theorizing, the involvement I speak of is as inevitable as the unfreedoms spawned by dictatorial rule.

In the concrete, what does this involvement entail? How are you, especially those of you who are stuck in academic work, going to practice it – if you accept it as a methodology, that is. I will not insult (further insult?) your intelligence and imagination by trying to spell out for you how this kind of involvement as a study methodology will concretize itself in actual fieldwork and research, for clearly that is exactly what, if your program and the statement of objectives mean what they say, you are going to be engaged in during this very conference.

At this point, let me apologize for having seemed to ignore, by saying what I have been saying, the whole spirit and intent behind this conference. They are spelt out in black and white in your program, and in belaboring what is already actually there, what could have been presupposed from the very start, I have not advanced the argument one bit. But as I said earlier in this rambling talk, we have to keep reiterating certain things – and I have done so here with you even to the point, as I said, of insulting your intelligence. But the ruffling of feathers is, as we say in Cebuano, *tinuyo gayod* (deliberate indeed) like the ritual stroking of fighting cocks by their handlers before they have a go at it.

Let me end then with the hope that this body will in truth become a functioning *ugat* – a hidden root or an equally hidden blood-vein, but for all that hiddenness, a vital conductor nonetheless of life-bearing ailments from the extremities to the center, from the hands and feet to the heart, from the people to the government (or whoever it is that makes the real decisions in our setup). You speak in this conference of “the power of anthropology.” It is there in the very subject of your study – man; in our anthropology, the Filipino. Can you help interpret for him and with him what his real thoughts are, his very life in fact, to those who ignore them or at least are not aware of them? When we talk of the problem, the setting, the challenges and responses, Philippine Anthropology itself, it means involvement with our people, with their thoughts, their life, not just as objects of study but as persons to help and cherish, to live with and work with, with all the tools and expertise that our discipline can offer.



If all this is indigestible (and slightly “subversive”), I highly recommend, as a once famous ad for a cure for gas pain put it: “Try it – you’ll like it!”