THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES AND ITS MISSION *

VICENTE G. SINCO **

MR. CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS,
MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF VISITORS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

MAY I EXPRESS TO YOU MY FEELINGS OF SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR YOUR GRACIOUS ATTENDANCE IN THIS GATHERING TONIGHT. I WOULD WISH TO INTERPRET YOUR PRESENCE IN OUR MIDST AS AN ELOQUENT TESTIMONY OF YOUR FAITH IN THIS UNIVERSITY, YOUR SYMPATHETIC APPROVAL OF ITS EDUCATIONAL WORK, YOUR HOPES IN ITS CAPACITY TO FULFILL ITS MISSION, AND YOUR FRIENDSHIP FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF THIS INSTITUTION A REALITY.

By your participation in this academic affair, you have given us what the philosopher George Santayana calls the "reassuring support for the misgivings of solitude." It is therefore an honor and a pleasure to welcome you to this hall on this occasion.

In accepting the election to the presidency of this University, I realized the magnitude of the task that the office involves. This was especially impressed upon me when the President of the Philippines, on administering my oath of office, declared that this University is expected to grow into the stature of the best institutions of its kind here and abroad.

This is indeed a high and noble aspiration. I am sure it is shared by all of us who believe in the capacity of the Filipino race to reach high levels of intellectual achievements.

Nature of the University

But if we are to train our vision upon this goal, it is quite obvious that we should know first of all what the nature of a true university is: and we should recognize the elements essential to the realization of any plan for the establishment of a great university. Without this sort of awareness to give us a sense of direction, our hopes are likely to be frustrated: our efforts are apt to become fruitless gestures; and our plans will remain but pompous blueprints of colossal pretensions.

The organization and aims of a university since the dawn of its existence have undergone changes that have materially affected the force and extent of its influence. This is but the natural and logical consequence of its character and purpose.

For the university is a dynamic institution, a living organism. Were it not so, it would have long become a mere museum of antique notions or a center of fossilized disciplines from which the spark of

* Inaugural address of President Vicente G. Sinco, delivered on June 18, 1958 after his investiture as eighth president of the University of the Philippines.

** A.B. (Silliman University); LL.B., LL.M. (University of the Philippines); L.H.D. (Ohio Northern University); LL.D. (University of Manila).

vital energy has long ceased to flicker. For it should be noted that the university first appeared in its institutional form some eight hundred years ago, way back in the distant days of the 12th century, in the Italian cities of Salerno and Bologna.

University Antedates Modern State

The university in a way virtually antedates the institution we call the modern state which therefore had little or no part whatever in the plan of its original creation. While the family, the Church, and the government, at various stages concerned themselves with the education of infants and adolescents, their interest in higher education, for the training of men and women in their more advanced stages of maturation, was aroused only after the university had made its appearance through the initiative of private and voluntary associations.

Civilization in various forms and in different degrees rose and flourished in many countries, among different races, and in various climes. But the university is distinctively a European creation. No wonder that it has preserved and developed a body of traditions reflecting the thoughts, the ideas, and the conceptions of the scholars, the thinkers, and the scientists of Europe.

Embraces Totality of Mankind

But in the course of its adventure in learning, the university in due time extended the coverage of its explorations to embrace the thoughts, ideas, and conceptions of scholars of other races and nations, until today the scope of its tradition encompasses the intellectual wealth of the totality of mankind.

It is the aim of great universities to attract men and women from all conditions of life. They keep their doors open to citizen and alien alike. For from their very nature, their appeal is cosmopolitan and their mission universal. The only passport they demand is the passport of intellectual competence. The only guarantee they require is the guarantee of honesty of purpose and dedication to work.

Their faculties are recruited from the best available teachers and investigators whom they could attract. Neither race, nor color, nor nationality, nor creed, nor political belief bars the competent scholar and the able scientist from their classrooms and their laboratories. Neither are these same factors ever considered in the admission of students. Disregarding these conditions, no educational institution may rightly claim even the name of a university, much less the prestige of a great university.

Courted by Church and State

This occasion hardly offers sufficient time for us to trace the details of the progress and the vicissitudes of the life of this ancient and venerable institution. But it may be well to observe that in the centuries that have passed since its foundation, the university had

come to develop prestige, to acquire power, and to gain influence to such an extent that sometimes it was befriended by the Church and the State alike as a useful ally, at other times it was opposed by both authorities as a dangerous foe, and still at other times it was employed by one or the other as an instrument of propaganda or as a tool to promote their particular interests.

But when left alone to follow the authentic course of its life, the university has remained loyal and faithful to its essential ideals and purposes which are the search for knowledge, the diffusion of knowledge, and the advancement of knowledge in its persistent and relentless quest for truth under the inspiration of that divine dictum that the truth shall make us free.

Identity with Progress

"It is a fact," Whitehead reminds us, "that today the progressive nations are those in which universities flourish." In synthesis, therefore, we have here the reason why we strive with all the might and the means within our command to make this University reach the highest stature it is possible for it to attain.

Pattern for the University of the Philippines

The pattern of functions we choose to follow in the University of the Philippines covers three main activities: (1) Instruction for liberal or general education, (2) training for the professions, and (3) research work.

We must admit that for many years the first function has received more lip-service and platitudinous praise than serious consideration. There is urgent and pressing need for this University to develop a program of general liberal education which shall constitute the basic intellectual training for every man and woman who must be enlightened and free citizens of this Republic. Such program should include those disciplines that have relevance to a better understanding of man as a unit of civilized society and as a member of a democratic community.

Liberal Education as the Basic Imperative

This course of general education should not be mistaken as a mere preparatory training for some particular profession or for some highly specialized activity. Regardless of the profession or the course that a student will follow as his life career, this common core of basic education is essential for an understanding of the age in which we live, for an appreciation of the values of life, and for the recognition of the true, the noble, and the beautiful.

To realize this desirable objective, our plan involves the cultivation and development of these traits and skills: (1) The ability to communicate thought effectively and to read with understanding materials of high value; (2) the ability to think critically and to make relevant judgments; (3) knowledge of the present status and past history of the culture and society of which we are a part; and

(4) an understanding of the nature of science as an intellectual process.

Primacy of Thinking

We are in entire agreement to a well-phrased passage from a statement issued by the Alumni Foundation of the University of Chicago which runs as follows: "The purpose of general liberal education is not a job, but *any* job; not a profession, but *any* profession; not a station in life, but *any* station in life. Like the marriage vow, 'in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse', general, liberal education recognizes that no one knows what life may bring. Whatever may happen to you in later life, you will be better off if you know how to think, to think clearly, and to think for yourself."

Neglect of Basic Idea

For the past many years, this idea of basic general education has been neglected or submerged to the disadvantage of man and society everywhere. The college of liberal arts, which is supposed to assume full responsibility for the basic education of men and women, has been gradually converted into a dumping ground of all sorts of subjects. Courses have proliferated by addition of new ones and by division and fragmentation of those existing.

Root of Present-Day Bewilderment

This condition of things have resulted in the bewilderment and the superficiality of the average student. In some instances, the college of liberal arts has been drawn under the spell of specialists of all sorts. In other instances, it has been made to follow the primrose path of so-called life-adjustment courses. It has been led into an admixture of specialized and vocational studies.

The total result has been that in many universities the college of liberal arts has ceased to broaden and to deepen the thinking faculties of the student, to develop his imagination, and to instill in him a discriminating sense of values. The individual who has gone through this maze of educational notions has but little concern for principles. However, he has acquired an inordinate desire for possessions, all kinds of material possessions, except what Lewis Mumford calls self-possession.

Confused Values

It would not be quite fair to place the entire blame for all this confusion on the administrators of colleges and universities and on members of their faculties. Quite often they could not resist the pressure of many parents, legislators, businessmen, and other parties who believe that the immediate problems that beset them in their daily experiences could be solved by ideas or notions that strike their fancies on the spur of the moment. Very little attempt is

made to go to the bottom of many problems, to shift the flitting and the irrelevant from the permanent and the valid answers.

There is indeed a great need for the training of men and women for all the productive enterprises of the land. They call for specialization. Technical workers are important. But we often forget that the men and women who can best answer the difficult problems of production, distribution, and management are those who can think for themselves and, therefore, those who have been trained to use their thinking processes.

Modern Barbarians

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, writing years before the rise of Hitlerism and the spread of Communism, viewed with grave concern and misgivings the growing influence of the dominant classes in many European countries. His reason was that these persons had in their hands tremendous powers of direction and leadership without possessing the broad intellectual training which we have referred to at this moment as general liberal education. He therefore spoke of the lawyer, the physician, the engineer, the politician, as modern barbarians, not unlike the vandals who conquered and destroyed the ancient Roman Empire and civilization and thus brought about the period which history has called the Dark Ages, a period of intellectual desolation pervading over the countries of Europe where the arts, the sciences, philosophy, and the refinements of life had once flourished.

The revival of learning relighted the torches of civilization. This was generated mainly through the establishment of universities which precisely started their work by offering and discussing studies in general education, which at that time consisted in the Greek classics, and which may therefore be rightly considered as the original function of universities.

Place for Specialization

Our insistence in the teaching of general education as we have described it should not be understood as expressing any measure of hostility against specialization and vocational training. We cannot run away from this age of specialism as we cannot deny to our country and our people the material advantages which we could enjoy only through the work of the specialist, whether he be a chemist, a physicist, an engineer, an economist, or some expert in business or technical work.

At this particular time when our country is actively engaged in the promotion of industries, in the scientific improvement of our farms and fisheries, and in the careful exploitation of our natural resources, the University of the Philippines as well as other colleges and schools of this nation must devote a great deal of attention to the training of men and women for specialized and technical occupations.

Liberal Education to Humanize Specialism

But it is precisely because our need for specialization is great that we should promote and encourage general liberal education with zeal and determination as a counterbalancing force for the maintenance and development of a well-ordered society.

The demands of society for the satisfaction of its physical and material needs are varied and multitudinous. They call for a great diversity of special occupations. But every specialist may be said to speak a language of his own that the other specialists often find it difficult to understand.

Integrating Social Factor

It is general education alone that can be depended upon to intervene as the integrating factor that works for harmony, order, and understanding among the different elements constituting our social system. Without this unifying factor, the danger of community and national disintegration, with all the evils it brings, is likely to be most difficult to arrest.

Moreover, let us not forget that the pace of technical improvement and the rapidity of mechanical invention are so great that specialized skill acquired today may be outmoded and rendered useless the following day. Techniques often change with amazing speed. It may happen that the work in which the student has been trained in school will no longer be useful at the time he is ready to earn a living. Under these circumstances, the wise course to follow is to prepare an individual to become an expert not only in some particular field but also in the art of the free man and the thinking citizen.

Ideal Citizen of a Democracy

The special task of the University in this respect is to assume the responsibility of doing the best it can to develop the man who can judge for himself, think for himself, and plan for himself so that he can truly govern himself. This is the aim of general education; and the person who has truly acquired it is the ideal citizen of a democracy.

It is pertinent at this point to repeat a portion of the report of the Harvard Committee on General Education in a Free Society which reads: "The aim of general education may be defined as that of providing the critical sense by which to recognize competence in any field. William James said that an educated person knows a good man when he sees one. There are standards and a style for every type of activity—manual, athletic, intellectual, or artistic; and the educated man should be one who can tell sound from shoddy work in a field outside his own. General education is especially required in a democracy where the public elects its leaders and officials; the ordinary citizen must be discerning enough so that he will not be deceived by appearances and will elect the candidate who is wise in his field."

Professional Education

Coming to professional training, we should remember that this is a traditional function of a university. From the earliest period of its history, the university devoted much of its attention to the education of the physician, the priest, and the lawyer. No wonder that these professions were known as the learned professions.

It is highly doubtful if the professions of law and medicine in our country today could, in their entirety, qualify to that appellation. But the University of the Philippines has consistently upheld and maintained high standards of professional education in all fields, and as evidence of this fact many of its professional colleges are accredited members of discriminating professional associations in the United States.

U. P. Standards

It is common knowledge that the professional colleges of this University have been responsible for turning out men and women who have distinguished themselves in their respective professions in this country. Our courses for professional training have not followed static schedules but have been adjusted from time to time to the changing requirements resulting from the progress of scholarship and science.

The alumni of our professional schools have brought prestige and honor to their Alma Mater by their valuable services to the government of this Nation and to their communities and stations in widely scattered places all over the country.

U. P.'s National Contribution

We can only speculate what might have been the state of the public health, the administration of justice, the public works and improvements, the transportation and communication system, and all the other phases of our national life had the University of the Philippines neglected the proper maintenance of its professional colleges.

Our guess that the country would have been the loser in these respects might not be exactly correct and conclusive; but considering that up to the outbreak of the last World War very few colleges had existed to give training for a considerable number of specific professions, it could be said that without the professional schools in this University many of the problems facing the country and calling for trained professionals would have been inadequately solved.

The Need for Quality Training

It has become the common complaint, of course, during the last few years that a number of professions are already overcrowded. We may well admit that quantitatively there is warrant and justification for this complaint. But qualitatively it is quite certain that the country still needs and will continue to need more recruits in certain professions which can very well stand a great deal of restrengthening in their present state by the addition of better mem-

bers and by the replacement of those who retire from the field. This University stands ready to produce that needed supply of professionals with technical preparation sufficient to enable them to render intelligent and satisfactory service.

Teaching is not Enough

But an institution of higher learning can hardly deserve the title of university should it remain a mere teaching center. It may be giving instruction of the most advanced type in literature, philosophy, the sciences, and arts; but that condition by itself does not make it a university. It may offer the most progressive professional courses; but that fact alone cannot yet qualify it as a university as long as it confines its work to teaching and nothing else. A faculty composed of the most efficient teaching instructors does not transform an educational institution into a real university, that institution which we have in our thoughts when we talk of raising the stature and dignity of our own center of learning and education into a great university.

At the risk of being tediously repetitious, let me state once again: A university is distinctively an association of scholars and students engaged in the search for knowledge, in the work of advancing the frontiers of knowledge, in the discovery of new learning, in the exploration of the higher spheres of thought to improve or to replace ideas that have ceased to be valid and true, and, above all, in the creation and cultivation of the spirit of discovery. Research, therefore, is the hallmark of a university.

An institution that confines its work to teaching is not a university but only a school or a college regardless of the number of courses it gives, the variety of its offerings for professional training, the number of its buildings, and the size of its faculty and student body. It is of course true that even in the United States some centers of higher education still call themselves universities in spite of the fact that they are mere teaching schools. But labels do not make them so, and the informed academic world cannot long be misled.

Research, the University's Hallmark

However, let there be no misunderstanding: Hand in hand with research in a university teaching comes as an inseparable companion, systematic, inspiring, stimulating, and thought-provoking. That kind of teaching is the unmistakable reflection of the teacher's application to learning and the result of the discipline of research. Fortunate are the students who are privileged to sit at the feet of such teacher. For in the words of a British scholar and College Principal: "He who learns from one occupied in learning, drinks of a running stream. He who learns from one who has learned all he is to teach, drinks the green mantle of the stagnant pool."

The University of the Philippines has meant to live up to the requirements of a real university. Despite the inadequate descrip-

tion of its purposes in its Charter, this University has long been engaged in research; and in this task its modest efforts are expanding into subjects and fields that we consider vital to the progress of our country.

Our energies are being directed to investigations not only in science, which is now the subject uppermost in the minds of many, but also in literature, history, economics, arts, and in other areas of human endeavor. For the progress of learning and the search for knowledge cannot be exclusively confined to any single department of human thought and activity. If the happiness of the community is a desirable goal, an unbalanced development of human knowledge will not enable us to reach that goal.

Vacuity in Productive Scholarship

But in the spirit of true university-trained men and women, we have to admit that our achievements in research work, specially in pure or fundamental research, have not yet reached that point where they could be said to have advanced the frontiers of human thought or to have given our own distinctive interpretation of life and art. Living as we are in the region of Asia, we cannot fail but be impressed by the record of other Asians—Indians, Chinese, and Japanese—whose contributions to modern science, mathematics, philosophy, and letters have at present ranked with the best that the West has produced.

It is high time that we look into the deeper causes of the paucity of our efforts to contribute to the sum total of man's higher intellectual possessions. It should be the concern of the University of the Philippines to look for the factors responsible for this vacuity in productive original scholarship.

This is not an easy task. But we might find that incentives have not been made abundantly available to attract enough of the best minds of the country into the service of the University. Work of high scholarship and intensive investigation requires concentration on the part of the worker. This is naturally difficult to secure if he is burdened by a heavy teaching load, if he is beset by financial worries arising from an inadequate compensation, if he has no time for leisure, if he is not provided with assistance that he considers necessary.

No Incentives for Professors

In addition to all these causes, let us consider that it is not usual for a person to dedicate himself with a passion to a task, specially when the task is not of the spectacular kind, unless there is held out before him some assurance of recognition and appreciation for good performance. Public recognition and acclaim are doubtless effective incentives to talent. They have actually shown their drawing power in our country among our people in such professions as law and medicine and in such activity as politics. The honor, reputation, and prestige the general public has attached, rightly or wrongly,

to these callings are certainly among the verifiable reasons why our youth have flocked into these fields of action in spite of their crowded condition today and the uncertainly of financial rewards.

Wherever we see scholarship and science growing in vigor and vitality, there the professor, the scientist, and the scholar are traditionally treated with respect and accorded high honor and social deference. This has been true in Germany which has given the modern world a large group of scientists, philosophers, artists, and other intellectuals. It has also been true in other progressive countries which have produced prominent intellectual leaders among their own people.

Nowadays when Russian advances in science and technology have surprised many nations and have even disturbed the peace of mind of some of them, it is interesting to learn from publications of recent date that the Soviet scientist is rewarded with munificence and accorded high social prestige and standing. His income is reported as ranging from $30 to $100 thousand a year. Paradoxically enough, this state of things disproves, at least in part, the Communist thesis that the profit-motive having nothing to do at all with achievement should be abolished once and for all.

As we look into our own conditions, we hardly find any of these incentives for the development of intellectual leadership of a superior order. The professor of this University, the leading institution of higher learning in this so-called show window of democracy in Asia, is given a remuneration so inadequate that it has almost degraded the profession of teaching and the work of the researcher. Under such circumstances, it is not easy to attract and keep many of the best minds in these occupations.

Encouragement Is Needed

This result is natural and unavoidable because a meager remuneration not only offers no protection against financial worries but also produces a depressing feeling of inferiority. This is aggravated by the fact that the professor and scholar in this country enjoy no social prestige much higher than that accorded to pedestrian callings. There are no special and regular pages in newspapers devoted to science. scholarship, and higher education as there are to society. shipping, business, industry, crime, or just plain gossip and scandal.

In such an atmosphere, the best minds of the Filipino race find very little inducement to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of higher learning. We who earnestly wish to see Filipino names in the roster of the world's leaders in science, letters, and arts should work at least for a change of climate to the end that careers in science and scholarship receive sufficient encouragement by some sort of substantial recognition and reward.

Should this condition come to pass, we should be justified to expect the Filipino scholar to make his distinctive contribution, no matter how humble and modest, to the store of human knowledge.

As Arnold J. Toynbee has so appropriately expressed: "The transient scholar of the day would have done his intellectual duty and have won his spiritual crown if, in passing through This World, he had made it his business, following the example of the first two servants in the parable of the talents, to contribute one fresh thimbleful of water to the great and growing stream of collective human knowledge."

The Error of Standardization

But setting aside the subject of what should be done in the immediate future for the successful recruitment of men of superior talent, setting aside what might be called our social sins of omission, we would be recreant to our duty, as we see it, should we deliberately fail to point out what we would call our sins of commission in the realm of higher education.

These consist largely in legislative and administrative acts and decisions that have cramped the style, to use in athletic phrase, of serious-minded and able educators of our country. I refer to the laws and regulations of the Government of the Philippines that authorize administrative officials to prescribe the details of the curricula of all educational institutions, from primary schools to universities, the choice of teachers, and the subjects that should be included in the schedule of courses.

Standardization is desirable in factories and machines. It is detestable in institutions of higher learning. The University of the Philippines has for a long time been exempted from these limiting and cramping interferences. But quite recently, laws have been passed requiring all institutions of learning, including the University of the Philippines, to include in their curricula certain specific subjects presumably intended to enrich the students' knowledge of a modern language and to instill in their minds our cultural heritage.

Freedom Is Essential

We do not doubt the good and noble intentions of the legislator and the executive official. But the life of an institution of higher learning has never been improved by dictation from without. Legislation has never improved the achievements of a university when it interferes with matters involving academic decisions.

Laws could help only when they confine themselves to enhancing the freedom of the university and the opportunities of the scholar. As Alfred North Whitehead rightly observed: "The modern university system in the great democratic countries will only be successful if the ultimate authorities exercise singular restraint, so as to remember that universities cannot be dealt with according to the rules and policies which apply to the familiar business corporations."

Fifty years have passed since this University was conceived and created. Were we to apply the provisions of our general corporation law, this University as a corporation should now be ready for final dissolution. But as an institution concerned with the mind and

the spirit of man, the university is a long-lived and hardy creature. Neither legislative enactments, nor royal edicts, nor the forres of nature, nor the vicissitudes of time can easily limit the span of its life.

Why the University Will Survive

Universities have survived systems of government, dynasties, kingdoms, and empires. They have lived on and on from one system of society to another. The reason back of all this has been well expressed by Nicholas Murray Butler in these lines: "The university is the resting-place of those activities, those scholarly aspirations, those intellectual endeavors which make for spiritual insight, spiritual depth, and spiritual beauty, but which cannot be transmuted into any coin less base than highest human service."

There is, therefore, but one cause which can effectively write *finis* to its existence. And that is when it can no longer advance the frontiers of human knowledge; when it ceases to be an instrument of intellectual freedom; when students and professors in their classrooms and laboratories grovel in abject obedience to authority; when it submits its judgment to outside directives.

When that time comes, the University will cease to be an effective agency for human service and may as well count the hours of its life. May the University of the Philippines be spared that fate of dishonor and disgrace. May it continue to hold firmly the banner of intellectual freedom. Then we may expect it to rise to the full stature of a great institution of higher learning under whose wings the democratic way of life will ever find shelter and protection.