

REPORTS ON PROJECTS AND SEMINARS

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY FORUM

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The Interdisciplinary Forum is a voluntary gathering of faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences of the Ateneo de Davao University. This was started in 1984 by Fely Soledad who invited faculty members from the different divisions of the College of Arts and Sciences to discuss certain predetermined and urgent issues relative to the conditions and situations in the region at that time. The faculty members who attended the first meetings were asked to share their opinions and thereby discuss the issues that were identified as currently pressing upon the members of the faculty and the Ateneo de Davao community. During these first meetings, attempts were made to define a format for the forum as well as formulate some objectives and purposes as rationale for the gathering. The attempts however, were not very fruitful for it seemed that most of the faculty present did not themselves have a clear idea as to the nature of the forum and were more interested in discovering what the gathering had to offer/in terms of ideas and activities. Eventually, the efforts to define a purpose for the forum gave way to the need to proceed with the main intent which was to exchange views on problems of current and general concern. In the subsequent discussions the concept of development emerged as a favorite topic and was consequently adapted as the theme of the forum. The meetings held for the first year thus addressed development as a thematic issue.

The participants who were presumed to be representing their respective Divisions were asked to share their Divisions' strategies or plans by which development, or the lack of it could be dealt with. By this time, the participants had agreed on an initial structure for the forum. The Religious Studies and Philosophy Divisions were asked to expound on the concept of development from the perspectives of theology and philosophy. After this, the chairman of the other Divisions took turns discussing or sharing their idea of development. The most enriching and rewarding experience in the forum was without doubt, the open discussion that followed each talk. The members of the forum were free to ask questions, offer insights or give comments that generally enlarged upon and elucidated the presentations and the issues that had arisen from the talks. Since the attendance was voluntary and one's presence entailed no obligations, the open forum was to a large extent lively and uninhibited. The overall result of the first year was considered very satisfactory and mutually beneficial to those present; consequently, the following year 1985 it was thought that a larger participation and gathering were desirable and justifiable.

At the start of academic year 1985-1986 four faculty members: Fr. Pasquale T. Giordano, S.J., Fely Soledad, Lourdes Mamaed, and Heidi K. Gloria produced a proposal urging the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Fr. Gorgonio S. Esguerra, to incorporate the Interdisciplinary Forum into the main

functions and activities of the College. The proponents had acted in their individual capacities and out of concern for sustaining the forum. The rationale for the forum was defined:

1. It provides the faculty members an occasion and a venue for discussing issues or problems that are of mutual interest and concern.
2. The forum has shown that every idea, issue, or problem is multifaceted with sociological, cultural, literary and other dimensions and therefore needs to be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective.

A general objective was formulated: The IF will attempt to explore and advance the integral approach to education.

The specific objectives were:

1. to enrich the course material in the different program curricula through an updating of information relating to trends in the different disciplines;
2. to inform and update the academic personnel of the activities of the different divisions;
3. to encourage the development of a talking and writing academic community.

As part of the proposal an incipient structure was written into the format. The responsibility for the forum was given to a committee which was composed of the faculty members who were the proponents. The committee was to have an *ad hoc* character until the following year when an election would provide for duly elected committee officials. The IF Committee was to have responsibility for the coordination and planning activities of the forum. The chairman was to call the meetings, plan a yearly prospectus, and discuss changes with the members of the committee who were to be drawn from the different divisions on a representative basis.

On July 25, 1985 the first elected members of the IFC held its first meeting to deliberate on the forum activities under the theme "Nation-Building and Nationalism". Some other topics considered for future discussions were spirituality, morality, ideology, social change, and ecology. The first topic that was discussed was "Campus Activism and Politicalization." For this first topic Fr. Gorgonio Esguerra, S.J. Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Deanna Jean Jison, a senior student were the main speakers. Fr. Esguerra's talk described politicalization as a process that is never completed and needs active elements to give it a direction. He identified these elements as the human, the social, the economic, and the political. Politicalization is seen as a most necessary process, for a campus that is not politicalized is not humanized, and a campus that is not humanized cannot educate. In this politicalization process, a liberal education plays an important role. With a liberal education, students are enabled to develop critical thinking and interdisciplinarity and in this way be of more service to the people. Ultimately, it is through a well-educated and a well-developed people that a nation can be built.

Jison observed politicalization on the ADDU campus to be of two types: a more "official" group which is allegedly supported by the administration through the CAMAR: and a smaller organization of students who belong to what was described as 'makibaka' type. Jison said that it is the former group which openly participates in campus activities and therefore this group enjoys an advantage over the latter which is more inhibited.

The range of comments and questions that these two talks elicited was

reflective of the problems and conditions obtaining at the time. The definition of politicalization was subjected to an extensive improvisation from the varying perspectives of each discipline. It was seen as having a faith dimension and therefore defined as a liberation process which was at the same time held to be a developmental process for people suffering under oppression. Thus, if the process springs from faith then social awareness must be regarded as an expression of faith. This begged the question of the extent of social awareness and involvement of teachers as well as students in the politicalization, i.e., liberation process. Other related questions were raised e.g., Is there an official stand of the school? What should be the role of the teacher in the liberation process? How does one counter manipulation which is ubiquitous in these politicalization processes?

As expected, the forum raised more questions than answers but eventually some questions were identified as needing immediate resolution. These were questions on the definition of politicalization and activism. During the subsequent deliberations of the IF committee it was decided that the term politicization, rather than politicalization be used and together with nationalism be clarified. Hence, the topic for the next forum "Politicization and Nationalism" was intended for the purpose of elucidating the terms as well as the topic of the overall theme, "Nation-Building and Nationalism."

Politicization and Nationalism

For the second forum Manuel Arriaga, Fely Soledad, and Heidi Gloria were designated to speak on Integral Politicization, Nationalism and Politicization, and the History of Nationalism, respectively. The idea was evidently to explicitize the terminology as well as the main terms used in the different topics selected for the forum discussions.

Arriaga presented a general philosophic perspective of politicization, a perspective which he admitted, finds resonances in other disciplines particularly the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Theology. The framework for the talk was to draw out the "implicit view of man" or what is technically called the Philosophy of Man as a basic understanding that underlies the concept of politicization. Arriaga proposed two conceptual elements essential to a general understanding of politicization: social awareness and social involvement.

The division between man's personal and public or social lives was denied. Arriaga asserted that *society is in man*.

... the new awareness is that one cannot really isolate the personal and the public, socio-political life of man from each other ... contrary to the old belief that socio-political institutions are realities alongside the zone of man's private, personal life, these socio-political realities permeate all aspects of man's being ... Even in his most private thoughts man is really not alone.

On the other hand, while man is social through and through, he is not however, reducible to the socio-political dimensions of his life, for together with social awareness man is given a certain freedom as regards the institutional framework which conditions his life. Contemporary man is distinguished by a

keen awareness that these social institutions are human products and the result of his free choice.

This awareness of and sense of freedom, vis-a-vis structures have fostered a greater sense of responsibility for these structures. Man is not reduced to the role of a passive acceptance of these structures to work out his personal salvation at their fringes. He is rather called upon to take charge of these structures and shape them in line with his ends.

Finally, the philosophical assertions end with the proposition that just as man is the author of institutions and structures, the very goal of these institutions and structures is none other than man himself. From such a framework, Arriaga proceeded to enumerate some guidelines for social action and politicization.

1. All forms of social action will have to be person-centered. The validity of social protests . . . as regards oppressive structures is derived precisely from the fact that these latter have become self-defeating. The danger however, that any change agent nowadays is prone to is that in his valid stress on the indispensability of structural reforms, he can end up reducing the whole range of social involvement to structural change, erasing the crucial distinction between the person and structure . . . One cannot sacrifice persons in the interests of structural reforms.

2. An either or approach says either of two things: change of heart suffices; or structural change alone suffices. The first reveals a view of man as a self-sufficient being minus the structure. The second reveals a materialistic view of man which reduces his being to socio-political dimensions deprived of any element of transcendence.

3. An integral sort of politicization must harmonize the goals of social change with the means that it employs, the short term with the long term objectives, strategy with vision. If the ultimate goal of social action is one's neighbor there is no place for hatred for any man in the process of change. If freedom is an element in one's vision of the goal one cannot use coercion and terrorism as means. If truth is part of one's vision of a reformed society, one cannot employ the strategies of deception and propaganda. Finally, if we envision a society which is not maintained by unjust violence we cannot use violence to bring it about.

Fely Soledad dwelt on the roots of present predicaments in the Philippines. She summarized both context and framework of her talk thus: "We are Christian educators in the Philippines, a Third World country which has long suffered from colonial and neo-colonial rule, and which is now experiencing a tremendous demand for change." She traced the changing concepts of nationalism as a legally defined principle as provided for by the Philippine Constitution of 1935 through the proclamation of Martial Law in 1972 describing how the country was denationalized through economic subversion by foreign, and in particular, American interests. Nationalism in this context becomes an ideology of deliverance from the powerlessness to which a colonized people has been consigned.

In the Philippine context, nationalism is the one force that can hold a disintegrating nation together, provided its promise of power and deliverance is addressed to the powerless of this nation: to a working class, powerless before externally imposed policies that suppress the creation and expansion of working opportunities which would enable it to survive; to a consumer class, powerless before a dispossessing inflation that is driving it to penury; to a peasant class, powerless before the oppression of centuries, the institutional violence of market forces, the inequities of an intractable feudal order . . . to the class of ethnic and cultural minor-

ities, powerless before the forces of internal and external colonialism; to our inventors, scientists, and technicians, powerless in a pre-industrial society that has no need for its talent and creativity . . .

Soledad offered a view of the educational world as traditionally perceived in relation to a bigger world. Noting that it takes fourteen years to prepare a person for life through formal education, she called attention to the maze of events which is at the same time taking place in the outside world. In the face of all these she asked where the Filipinos choose to be.

. . . Do we intend to contribute to the changes that are taking place; or do we decide to go with our traditional function? If there were nothing basically wrong with society this traditional function need not be put in question. But as things are, we ask: For whom is this kind of education? When the costs keep escalating so that most people . . . can no longer afford to send even one child for a complete education. Add to that the sadder fact that after all the tremendous effort, one out of every four college graduates today is unemployed: So where does that leave us and our students, if we choose to keep ourselves in that sanitized traditional world?

There is no better venue for interdisciplinarity than the struggle of our people, said Soledad. "Here is spirituality even made more real by the indigenization of Christ . . . philosophy applied to lift a people from powerlessness, science that teaches analytical thinking to a people who have long stopped thinking for themselves, and humanities that shows what *Populorum Progressio* calls the promotion of human and spiritual progress of all men . . ."

In the "History of Nationalism," Heidi Gloria traced the origin of its root word, nation to the 17th century. The word nation comes from *natus*, which means to be born into. In her talk, Gloria emphasized the dynamics between nation and state, not because they are inherently antagonistic, but because each plays a role vital to the other. In fact, neither concept is viable in the absence of the other. There have been nations before there were states in the modern sense of the word. In its evolution in the western world, nationalism became a socio-political phenomenon in 17th century Europe where the rise of small nation-states was the result or outgrowth of feudalism and the breakdown of centralized political rule.

Against the chaos of civil strife there arose a strong reaction in favor of a strong state. The first nation state to emerge in this category was France. Since the consolidation of monarchical power was achieved by the expansion of the monarch's personal estate against the estates of the other nobles, the state or the political entity that resulted from this process was regarded as the extension of the person and powers of the king himself. Hence, the state was the ruler himself, and sovereignty originally referred to the person of the monarch who was called the sovereign. Popular sovereignty or the sovereignty of the nation and people came later in the 18th century. Earlier, an Englishman, John Locke became the first philosopher to use the term popular sovereignty to challenge, rather than support absolutism. In the French revolution of 1789 the rights of man and popular sovereignty both found full assertion. At the end, the French revolution changed the face of Europe and spawned as well, a new age of nationalistic awakening. After 1815 most European countries had already forged strong and united nations.

Nationalism became a full blown movement and sentiment in the 19th century. With its emphasis on the uniqueness of particular groups it came to be equated with group identity in which individual pride was collectivized. Patriotism means loyalty to the state and transcended all other forms of loyalty. Sovereignty was no longer regarded as the sovereign right of a ruler but one in which both ruler and subject were embodied without distinction.

Gloria spoke of Philippine nationalism as a byproduct of colonialism, an experience that the Philippines shares with other Asian countries. Through colonization the Filipino experienced the first stirrings of a distinct identity as against the identity of another race. In this context, Filipino nationalism was a reaction against an external enemy-colonialism. In the Filipino experience one cannot speak of a tension between nation and state. A state was imposed upon a country in which there was no nation to begin with. The first stirrings of nationalist consciousness was aroused by a struggle for an identity, a struggle which was aborted when the Philippines was given recognition as an independent country in 1946. After this, it became difficult to sustain the nationalist sentiment. What remained was a rankling dissension among different regional groups each struggling for a separate identity and seeking to make its own identity the identity of the state itself. The present challenge of nationalism must be to forge an identity for the state from out of these different identities.

An Assessment of the IF

At the start of the second semester of SY 1985-1986, the IF Committee agreed to conduct an assessment survey on the forum. On November 21, 1985 the results of the survey questionnaire were the following:

1. Of the 64 faculty members who answered the questionnaire, 56 (88%) stated that they had attended the IF sessions.
2. The IF was considered as both informative (47 affirmative answers) as well as relevant (36).
3. Eleven teachers cited conflict of activities as the reason for not being able to attend the IF sessions.
4. Nine suggested a change of the forum format to small group discussions, and eight (8) wanted copies of the talks distributed before the sessions.

Based on these findings, the Committee agreed on several changes, among them the recourse to small group discussions to allow for the widest possible participation. At this time, the Interdisciplinary Forum Committee proposed that the faith dimension be brought more explicitly into the topics of the Forum. Two members of the Religious Studies Division, Fr. Robert Hogan, S.J., and Rafael Gaid did a paper "*Pagpapahalaga sa Tao*," "*Pagpapahalaga sa Diyos*" (To Value the Human Person is to Give Authentic Worship to God.). This paper on the value of the human person was to a large extent fired by the trauma experienced by the University Community from the tragic death of a young ADDU coed, brutally raped and murdered.

The Gospel of St. John reminds us of a basic principle of life in the Kingdom of God when it quotes Jesus as saying: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24) Perhaps, it would not be amiss to take that principle

and twist it around a little as a starting point for this brief reflection. Sayang if Judith Cansino's death is allowed to pass by without bringing forth some fruit in the lives of those of us that she left behind . . . if we can at least reflect on it and draw some fruit from it . . . then perhaps her death will become in some small but real sense redemptive for all of us.

After the paper was presented, guide questions were provided and small group discussions followed. The result was the desire to form various action committees to deal with specific problems facing the people of Davao at this time: anti-pornography, anti-drugs, anti-prostitution, follow up on the Cansino murder case, help for the political detainees. These committees were organized through the initiative of the Faculty Club of ADDU. The work of the Committees were divided into three phases: first, a public letter addressed to the proper authorities concerning a particular problem would be sent; second, a dialogue would be requested to learn the particular status of the case; and third, if the result of the dialogue is unsatisfactory, a consequent action, such as mass rallies and demonstrations, would be resorted to.

Conclusion

This brief report shows the process of growth and development of the Inter-disciplinary Forum; from specific issues of current concern addressed by different disciplines, to the awareness of the need to include the faith dimension, and finally the steps for significant action.