

‘PHILIPPINE FEDERALISM: ON THE ROAD TOWARD POLITICAL DESTINY’

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This is a keynote address of one of our own. The typical Keynote Speaker is someone with a lofty position, a high pedigree, great influence, abundant knowledge or hefty pocket. I fall short on all five.

As Keynote speakers go, I am as ordinary as they come. On the subject matter at hand, I could assume some substance only if presented in tandem with the likes of Dr. Pepe Abueva: I provided the passion, Dr. Abueva, the wisdom. Presented alone, I feel inadequate.

But our national steering committee, either in a moment of inspiration or in a fit partisan predilection which the Visayans among us would describe as “*sa walay pabor-pabor*” or without favoritism, chose me your national convenor and chair, to do the honors.

I am made to understand, however, that my selection has to do with the very essence of this movement that we want to promote, protect and project.

That is of its being citizen-led, citizen-run and citizen directed.

Not that there’s no room in this group for politicians or political leaders. For if that be so, we have no business being involved in politics.

Indeed, there’s no room for politicians in CMFP. But only as they act in concert with, and in step with the spirit of, the bigger body politic; the one that’s structural transaction that will make possible, finally-hopefully, true national peace and prosperity.

But that’s getting ahead of our story or getting sidetracked altogether. I was actually only trying to impress you of my shortcomings as a keynote speaker.

Given that I now occupy the podium to deliver the main address this morning, I implore you to indulge me – inadequacy and all!

Let me start then with a concise situationer of the national predisposition to go for the known quantity, the experienced, the tried and the tested. Even if such is found wanting, and shown clearly to be ineffective and not working.

Such, indeed, is the tried and tested unitary and centralized system of government, which is run from Imperial Manila.

Such a one, truly, that is responsible for causing inadequate development of the regions which spawned massive poverty and, in its wake, insurgency and rebellion.

Various statistics attest to the gross inequities and disparities in regional development.

Thus, significant change can be expected only if the regions are given greater autonomy and power to run their own affairs, mobilizing their own resources for the purpose, and getting support from national government mainly to the extent of their just due or in the interest of equitable and balanced national growth.

This is the promise of Federalism – not promise in the sense of a politician’s sweet talk, but promise in the sense that given the necessary and determined effort of the citizenry, change in the service of the public good is achievable.

But for this to happen, we have to reckon with the national predisposition I was referring to earlier.

This is the tendency to take the easy road, to take the familiar path – even if it leads nowhere.

Allow me to highlight this point by way of this untypical prayer entitled, DISTURB US, O LORD:

DISTURB US, O LORD

“Disturb us, O Lord,
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves;
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little;
when we have arrived in safety because we sailed too close to the shore

“Disturb us, O Lord,
when, with the abundance of things we possess
we have lost our thirst for the water of life;
when, having fallen in love with Time, we have ceased to dream
Eternity;
and in our efforts to build the new earth have allowed
our vision for the New Heaven to grow dim.

Stir us, O Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas, where storms shall show Thy Mastery
Where, losing sight of land we shall find the stars,

In the Name of Him Who pushed back the horizons of
Our hopes and invited the brave to follow Him.

Amen.

And so, fully aware of the implications of national stagnation as a result of the repletion of the unworkable and the perpetuation of the unfit, it is my hope that this gathering will

galvanize into a force for the future, rather than remain tied to an ineffectual past that sustains a problematic present.

At this point I will make some bold statements.

Today we set sail to venture into wider seas, to brave the storms and grow in strength and take responsibilities.

Today we begin the march into less known territory and unfamiliar terrain, understandably diffident and a bit groping considering that we have no direct experience to draw confidence from. But march to the beat of the drums of history we will.

Today, indeed, **we are embarked on a glorious journey toward our political destiny!**

Now I can understand if some people will find this last statement a bit speculative and presumptuous.

But I humbly submit, this is not an empty assertion.

Coming from a region whose character is defined or accentuated by the mighty MT. APO, the country's tallest, and around which great events that shake the nation continue to happen, symbolically or literally, I speak with the insight of a mountain person who has seen them all.

Well, not exactly all directly with mine eyes, but also through the metaphysical scopes of the ancestral spirits that inhabit the mountains – and yes, through the vision that grows from the march of human events in the lowlands, the plains, the marshes, the rice fields, the plantations, the coastal areas and marine sanctuaries, and smell reek with the stench of injustice and inequity.

Now I am beginning to sound complicated and the thought now border on the undecipherable.

But isn't this exactly what's happening and what has been happening in this our beloved country?

Everything is complicated. Traffic is complicated and seems insolvable. Garbage is complicated and seems insolvable.

Holy shucks! Disposing of garbage has to follow certain central regulations or some such sophisticated and modern arrangement?

And goodness gracious – why do they have all this tangle of concrete bridges in Metro Manila with funny sounding names: clover leaf, flyover, underpass, overpass – and no river or creek below them?

Meanwhile, you have thousands of rivers in the provinces and far-flung barangays which millions of Filipinos have to cross daily – by swimming across them, by banca, on foot or on

board the modern rural technological marvel – the mighty TRICYCLE that also serves as a mini submarine!

Can you think beyond that? No it's completely out of this world! In short, it is undecipherable.

Well things in this country have been mostly undecipherable to the common folk.

They cannot understand what's going on but since things continue to go on anyway, people seem powerless to stop or change them; people in their millions adjust to the situation, become used to it and simply get by and continue to live a boring existence.

And let's face it. Even the so-called great institutions of learning in this country have been just content with the same tired and weary ideas in the political economy. They have just been going through the motions of discussing and debating issues but not really exploring the core of things, and not really initiating serious and sustained probes into alternatives that can make a difference.

And so we have become used to things as they are and seen almost incapable of thinking beyond, much less acting beyond what is familiar, even if unexciting.

Oh well, we have also taken care of that. We have this regular spectacle elections that are surefire energizers that get people excited. Excited particularly about the personalities that participate in them. Excited over the possibilities of extra goodies, extra attention or some such ephemeral things that could come from the politicians.

But let's hear it from William Shakespeare who says: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

For at the end of every such exercise, we always find our 'idols' short of our expectations and couldn't wait to have the next elections to find a replacement.

We have even learned some shortcuts and replace them out of turn, in between terms.

But when the smoke settles down, frustrations sets in. Nothing has changed. *Pareho lang silang lahat*, people say.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have good news and bad news for you.

The good news is: The next election is just around the corner; or haven't you noticed yet?

The bad news is; we're in for another bout of soul-wrenching frustration.

Hindi pa ba tayo napapagod nito? The psychiatrists seem to have a theory about this. Or was it Freud who called this SADO-MASOCHISM?

Well, nothing-new *pare-pareho pa rin*. *At wala naman tayong magagawa, eh*.

This sense of utter hopelessness is deadly.

It has caused the grim and determined among us to go to one extreme – the armed struggle.

It has also led the tired and weary to the other extreme. INERTIA. No effort. Nothing doing.

All this because truly we have been missing certain points.

Content and concerned with NOT losing sight of land, we have all this time sailed close to the shore – and failed to see the stars.

In fact, we do not even know anymore the shape and wonders of the moon.

But not all is lost yet. We have an alternative.

It might be worth nothing that it has been there all this time. Like a twinkling star in the firmaments, it has been sending signals.

But most of us have become deaf and blind to the urgings of the spirit – of the cosmic if you will.

And I am only half facetious if I say that the political future of this country had been written in the stars.

The alternative is here. You saw this coming. But I have to say it – better let's all say it together: FEDERALISM IS AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME!

That is not all. Federalism is our future. Federalism is our destiny.

Since destiny is a vision writ in heaven, and I have seen the signs, I don't have to explain anything just now.

Federalism is the country's political destiny, ***basta!***

And this gathering, already a testament to the fact that the idea is alive and well and will acquire wings to fly and cover the entire country, is the beginning of that momentous journey.

Now, either I will turn out to be a real prophet – which means we will have the Federal Republic of the Philippines in 2010, I am a prophet of future not our own – meaning Federalism a little further down the road. Or I am just a passerby!

Thank you at ***Mabuhay ang Sambayanan, Mabuhay ang Sambayanang Federal.***