

# Revolution and UP <sup>1</sup>

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**H**indsight is the lowest form of wisdom. I can tell you what it was like when your campus was nothing but cogon waste, when all those trees that line your streets were just saplings.

I can tell you, why we were left behind by all our neighbors when in the fifties and the sixties we were the richest, most progressive country in the region, when Seoul, Tokyo, were ravaged by war and Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta were mere kampongs, when Bangkok was a sleepy town criss-crossed by canals. I never was in China till 1979, but I know in the forties that that country was always threatened by famine. It had a population then of only half a billion. Now, with more than a billion people, famine is no longer a threat, although hunger still lurks in some of its distant regions.

Hunger has always been with some of us, too, but not as much as it is now when so many poor Filipinos eat only once a day. *Altanghap*,<sup>2</sup> I wonder how many of you know what that word means?

So then, why are we poor? Why do our women flee to foreign cities to work as housemaids, as prostitutes?

We are poor because we have lost our ethical moorings, this in spite of those massive religious rallies of El Shaddai, those neo-gothic churches of the Iglesia ni Kristo sprouting all over the country, in spite of the nearly 400 years of Catholic evangelization.

How can we build an ethical society? We must remember that so-called values are neutral — that so much depends on how people use them. James Fallow's thesis on our "damaged culture" which many of us understand is neither permanent nor inherent.

Ramon Magsaysay infused public life in the fifties with discipline and morality. Arsenio Lacson as mayor of Manila cleaned up City Hall. Even today, shining examples of honesty among our public officials exist, but they are few and they are not institutionalized.

And it is precisely here where the university comes in with its courses in the humanities.

Of all of the arts, only literature teaches us ethics. Literature presents us with problems, complex equations that deal with the human spirit and how often the choice between right and wrong is made. In this process, we are compelled to use our conscience, to validate the choice we make, and render the meaning, the pith of our existence.

The university then is the real cathedral of a nation; the humanities, particularly its literature department, the altar. But how many of our teachers know this crucial function of literature, how many teachers themselves possess this sense of worth, and mission?

To know ourselves, to make good and proper use of our consciences, we must know our own history. So few of us do; in fact, we nurture no sense of the past.

If our teachers know our history, if they soak it in their bones, then it follows that they also impart this very same marrow to their students.

If this is so, how come then that when Bongbong Marcos visited Diliman some time ago, he was mobbed by students who wanted his autograph? How come that in La Salle, business students cited Marcos as the best President this country ever had?

We are poor because we are not moral. Can this immorality as evidenced by widespread corruption be quantified? Yes, about 23 billion pesos a year is lost according to NGO estimates.