

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE¹

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An oft-repeated quotation stresses that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. Being the cream of the crop of Silliman University, you will surely land among the choicest positions in business, government and service institutions. With your excellent training, you may well be among the leaders not only of this country but of the world.

You are perhaps luckier than the generation ahead of you. Opportunities abound in every field of endeavor. The level of modernization and industrialization has reached a point of sophistication wherein racial differences or social class count least. It is the possession of knowledge that matters. This offers you, who are the best and the brightest, a chance to lead, to serve, exercise power, accumulate wealth and gain deeper knowledge. But it is also the modernization and advances in technology that pose challenges to the employment of human resources. Machines and computers are substituting for many, the activities that human minds and human hands can perform. In this age of modernization, human beings are not only competing with fellow human beings but are also competing with machines. It is precisely this phenomenon which opened to us windows of opportunities and enormous challenges.

It seems like centuries ago when thinkers, inventors and intellectuals were accused of witchcraft or burned at the stake. Now, experts are demanded by industry. Today, ideas are big business; information is wealth, bought and sold in the marketplace.

Development in science and technology has also shrunk the globe, thus opening opportunities in every corner of the planet earth. Corporations now span the oceans. The globe is now a single village. And each one of you has more chances today of landing jobs in a multinational in swanky Wall Street in New York or in an NGO, lending out to small enterprises in the backroads of Zimbabwe, whatever choice you make. The range of job choices for you is immense. It has never been like this.

Add to this, the fact that the Philippines is fast joining the global village. The country is now on a pivotal turning point, growing at rates that approach those of the tiger

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economies of Asia. The growth rate of 5.1% attained last year is based on strong growth of investments and exports. While we have made inroads into the structural changes in the economy, we must see to it that the economic performance of the past two years will be sustained and say goodbye to the boom and bust cycle which characterized the growth pattern of the past.

How did we do this? What are its effects? And how will this impact on your future?

First, we implemented structural reforms to free the market from unnecessary regulations. The Aquino administration dismantled monopolies in coconut, sugar and other basic commodities such as wheat and grains, etc. The Ramos administration followed this up with telecommunications, shipping and banking. We reduced tariffs and removed import restrictions on many products. We are committed to the open trading system and investment liberalization regime of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The Senate ratified the new General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and authorized our becoming a founding member of the World Trade Organization. We removed virtually all restrictions on foreign exchange transactions and liberalized banking and foreign investments.

Second, we instilled fiscal and monetary discipline. For the first time in 20 years, the National Government generated a cash surplus of P18 billion in 1994. Also, the consolidated public sector deficit was only 0.1% of GNP, the lowest ever achieved, since we started monitoring the consolidated public sector in 1985. Thus, also for the first time, the National Government repaid almost P3.0 billion of its debts in 1994 by buying back at discounts the Brady bonds which the Philippine Government issued to replace the high interest commercial international debts. We shall be repaying our Paris Club debts and working hard at graduating from being a debt rescheduling country.

Likewise, with the creation of the New Bangko Sentral to replace the old debt-saddled Central Bank, we now have an institution that is able to manage liquidity effectively and focused on monetary policy and management.

Third, the administration decentralized the government. A new Local Government Code was enacted empowering local governments to design their programs and implement their projects. Villages, towns and provinces now have a role to play in the decision-making process. Correspondingly, the share of local governments in government resources was increased. More than at any other time in our history, the local people can shape their future and destiny.

Fourth, this administration sought peace with groups from both ends of the ideological spectrum. Peace dialogues are now in full swing. The Government is presently undertaking peace dialogues with the National Democratic Front, the RAM, and the MNLF and

MILF. The remarkable strength exhibited by the leftists and the rebels has been significantly dissipated by dissensions. At the same time support for rightist coup plotters were eroded as reform programs took their foothold. The tearing down of the Berlin wall and the capitalist "invasion" of a China has revealed the power of freedom and the supremacy of the market.

Stability on the macroeconomic sphere and the political front brought about economic upturn. Low inflation and low interest rates led to higher saving and investment boosting growth prospects. The inflow of foreign investments amounting to US\$4.3 billion in 1994, the highest ever attained in our postwar history, indicated a strong confidence in the way the country is managed.

While the economic scenario is bullish, the task ahead remains tough. Maintaining the appropriate climate for investment and growth is difficult. Discipline in the fiscal and monetary fields must be maintained. Structural reforms must continue. We have shown in the past two years our ability to rise from economic doldrums and political upheavals. Our task is to sustain the developments which have ushered us to where we are economically today. Overconfidence could lull us into a trap that will fling us back to instability and stagnation.

For the private sector, adjusting to a more competitive environment is likewise difficult. Protected by controls for a long time, domestic enterprise must shape up to competition from foreign investors and foreign industries. They have to implement measures to cut cost, map out new strategies to expand markets, specialize in profitable product lines, adopt new ways of doing things.

What does this imply?

A more competitive environment in a freer political and economic setting means the need for intelligent, committed and dedicated individuals, with certain expertise will continue to rise.

Experts will be needed in government, from the smallest village to the National Government department to design and implement programs, and to improve the quality and effectiveness of governance.

Experts will be needed in enterprise. Competition will require them to get the brightest people with the brightest ideas. If not, they will languish in the race to attain efficiency. They will get buried in the dust of their competitors.

Experts will be needed in the international community. International organizations such as the newly-organized World Trade Organization, ASEAN, APEC and the existing ones under the UN family will be needing more people to provide ideas on how to coordinate programs for the growing global village.

Experts will be needed everywhere---from the small NGO supporting micro-enterprises in Batanes to the giant trading firms and banks in Tokyo and New York.

Experts will be needed in almost every field---from computers to fashion to philosophy.

My dear young and bright friends, the global village is at your doorstep.

But lest I may be mistaken for being a cockeyed optimist, I wish to emphasize that the road to success may be fraught with dangers. It is not easy to compete. You have to be prepared for it. You have to burn your midnight oil for it.

Once you join that global village, you will continue to be tested by a barrage of challenges and that will almost seem to have no end. I therefore advise you to be always on your toes. You absorb information from all sources and analyze them carefully. You listen, read, talk and discuss with others. You make most use of your college education to develop your skill in areas where you are most interested.

The only way to success is to meet the competition head-on, using to the fullest your advantages in terms of very good education, molded in Christian values and nurtured in the Filipino tradition. Several years from now, you may well be one of the leaders of this country, making decisions that will shape the future of generations yet to come.

But let me quote Claro M. Recto's beautiful and timely admonition on the youth's responsibility:

"And yet, it is beyond question that the forces of change must rely on the emergent strength of youth. So much of this country's future glory or tragedy depends on its youth. They may claim that they are ill-prepared for so great a task. The fact remains, however, that the task is theirs, whether they like it or not. For this task they have advantages which have been denied the elder generation. They have not grown timid and afraid. They have no positions to safeguard, no vested interests in life to protect, no accustomed comforts to cling to. They have audacity and courage, curiosity and restlessness, energy of body and mind--all essential to a movement that demands sweeping radical changes in vast area of national life. But above all, the duty of awakening and enlightening our people is theirs. They will be heirs to the fruits of nationalist endeavor, the ones to take pride in the dignity and prestige of a truly sovereign nation. It is their lives that will be enriched by the resulting material prosperity, in the same manner that it will also be they who shall suffer the degradation and poverty that their own indifference, complacency and the lack of nationalist fervor and dedication will inevitably cause."

I hope that the future you want will not only be for yourself but will also be for the institution you are working with, for our country and for the world. May the Christian values which Silliman University taught and nurtured you, wherever you will be, be your guiding light and carry you through life's hills and vales. To the parents, guardians and relatives of the honor students, please accept my warmest felicitations on this memorable occasion. To the honor students, my sincere congratulations and may God Bless You.