

# MARKS OF INTELLECTUAL MATURITY

Constancio C. Amen

**S**OME twenty-four hundred years ago there live in Greece a man named Socrates. One day the Oracle made the important statement that Socrates was the wisest of all men. Socrates, surprised, could not believe that. So he went about finding out if there was any truth to what the Oracle had said. He inquired into the state of knowledge of poets, politicians, and other people reputed for their wisdom. And Socrates discovered that the poets, the politicians and the others—men well known for their depth of learning—were not wise at all. He found that these people believed they knew much when in fact they knew very little, at least not enough to entitle them to the name, "wise". At the end of his inquiry Socrates concluded that the Oracle was right, that he was the wisest of all men. His wisdom lay in the fact that he knew that he did not know, whereas the poets, the politicians and the other people did not know that they did not know what they believe they knew. They were only pretenders to knowledge.

Socrates has left us the injunction, "Know thyself." He discovered that one important concern of every man should be to know himself—to know what he knows, what he does not know, what he thinks he knows but doesn't, and what he is in doubt about. We may say that we begin to be intellectually mature when we begin to inquire into our intellectual condition. Lest, like the poets and politicians of Socrates' day, we be misinformed about ourselves.

And so let us each ask ourselves: Am I intellectually mature? Surely that is a question that should concern every college student and graduate. We have an obligation to be intelligent, to be intellectually mature. But to answer that question we have to know what it is to be intellectually mature. I shall then discuss some—only some traits of the intellectually mature person.

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*The Challenge of Ideas*

The intellectually mature person delights in the purely intellectual. He believes in the value of ideas as ideas. By active interest he promotes the origination, dissemination, and discussion of ideas.

Aristotle said that the one distinctive characteristic of man—the property that distinguishes man from plants and other animals, with which he has much in common—is reason. Man is not truly man unless he performs the distinctive function of rationality. To Aristotle “. . . to be learning something is the greatest pleasure not only to the philosophers but also to the rest of mankind. . . .” True happiness, Aristotle said, is contemplation.

Albert Einstein expressed it this way:

There exists a passion for comprehension, just as there exists a passion for music. That passion is rather common in children, but gets lost in most people later on. Without this passion, there would be neither mathematics nor natural science. What, then, impels us to devise theory after theory? Why do we devise theories at all? The answer to the latter question is simply: because we enjoy comprehending, that is reducing, phenomena by the process of logic to something already known or (apparently) evident.

Shakespeare said the man is to be pitied who has no music in his soul. So to be pitied is he who is incapable of the delights of the mind.

We who are in the university have a special reason to be concerned about the purely intellectual. For what really is a university? Isn't a university a factory and market of ideas? The essence of the university is the origination, dissemination, and discussion of ideas. There is no university where there is no passion for the purely intellectual.

Unfortunately, as we look around in our country we find that education has to a shameful extent become commercialized. How many of our colleges and universities are not run for mainly profit reasons? It is true that we rank high in the world in the number of citizens going to college or university. But it is a serious question how many of our college and university students are motivated by the desire to know and how many are interested only in the units and the degree and the money that the degree makes possible. You often hear it these days that if you get so many units in graduate school you get so much increase in salary. One wonders how many go to

graduate school only for the increase in salary.

It is boringly familiar that our education authorities are working hard to detect the schools and colleges that are substandard. We appreciate the concern of our government authorities. But until our students themselves are concerned; until our students are motivated by the desire to know; until it is the purely intellectual that impels our students—so long will our government authorities have to run in circles trying to catch diploma mills. There would be no diploma mills if there are no students who patronize them.

How much interest is there among our college students in purely intellectual activities? How much purely intellectual intercourse goes on outside the classroom? If a basketball game and a purely intellectual session were to take place at the same time on a college campus, which activity would attract the more students?

In terms of the purely intellectual, we are still an underdeveloped nation. What recognition do we as a people give to the intellectual? Whom do we applaud, whom do we honor? It is the politician, it is the man who shakes the hands of the people, it is the man who delivers speeches to big crowds, it is the man whose name we often read in the newspapers. But whoever gets excited in this country over a discovery in chemistry? Or over a paper in psychology? How often do we see a scientist's name on the front page of the newspaper? What learned societies are there in our country?

### *The Discipline of Logic*

The intellectually mature person arrives at conclusions on the basis of evidence or logical deduction. All assertions are reasoned out on the basis of the evidence. He does not reject an assertion unless he has an argument to refute it.

In this respect the Church in its history has more than once fallen short of maturity. One instance was the action of the Church hierarchy on Galileo. From the Second Century to the Sixteenth the Ptolemaic theory that the earth is the center of our solar system had been universally received. Then in the middle of the Sixteenth Century the Polish astronomer Copernicus advanced what is now known as the Copernican system, the theory that the earth is only one of the heavenly bodies revolving around the sun. In these days the Copernican system was revolutionary.

In 1609 Galileo began his researches on the telescope, which had not

been invented in Holland only the year before. Galileo was able to make a much more powerful telescope than the one made in Holland. For a number of years he devoted his time to the study of the heavenly bodies. And his findings established the truth of the Copernican system.

Then his troubles began. When Galileo's strong defense of the Copernican system was published (1632), the Church authorities condemned his work as highly dangerous, perhaps because in their opinion it took away from the earth its preeminence in the solar system, thereby making man's abode less important in the scheme of God's creation! Galileo was summoned to appear before the Inquisition in Rome. He was compelled to kneel before a great assembly and to renounce the truths he had maintained in his writings. The first verdict was imprisonment but this was commuted to banishment to the villa of the Grand Duke of Tuscany at Rome. Later he was allowed to return to Arcetic, not far from Florence.

The point is that the Church dignitaries compelled the scientist Galileo to renounce his findings but they did not give any arguments to show why Galileo's conclusions should be abandoned. They did not argue with Galileo as to the accuracy of his findings. They merely compelled him to renounce the results of his investigations, on pain of imprisonment.

Or take the case of Martin Luther. In the controversy between Luther on one hand and the Pope and other Church dignitaries on the other, the Church authorities committed another mistake of intellectual immaturity. In his study of the New Testament, Martin Luther discovered that man does not buy or earn his salvation. Luther saw that it is God's love in Christ and man's faith in Christ that make his salvation possible. This is the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith.

Now this Biblical teaching was opposed to the teachings and practices of the Church in Luther's time. The Church hierarchy summoned Martin Luther and demanded that he renounce his views. But Luther would not recant. His position was well founded on the Bible, and he was prepared to argue his case. But the Church dignitaries insisted that he give up his views. In fact Luther's life was endangered because of his refusal to bow down to the hierarchy.

Here again, what I'd like us to see is that the Church authorities did not refute Luther's conclusions; they would not debate with

Luther point by point; they merely wielded the big whip of authority.

It is intellectually immature to ask a man to give up his views unless you can present arguments to show why he should, arguments based on evidence or logical deduction.

There was a young man who was sure that the version of the Bible used by the Protestants is bogus, that it is only the version used by the Roman Catholics that is genuine. Upon questioning he admitted he had not seen either version of the Bible! How could he have arrived at that conclusion without having read either version? It is intellectually immature to hold an opinion for which one has no basis at all.

### *The Worship of Authority*

The intellectually mature person does not accept a principle merely because it has been advocated by some great person or by an institution.

During the Dark Ages, when learning underwent a virtual black-out, the works of Aristotle seeped through the darkness into the mind of Europe. The Arabs brought the writings of Aristotle to medieval Europe. By the early Thirteenth Century Aristotle's works had been translated into Latin. The efforts of Thomas Aquinas helped to entrench the teachings of the Greek philosopher—Aquinas undertook the gigantic task of trying to synthesize Holy Scripture and Aristotle. Now by the Thirteenth Century the authority of Aristotle had come to be accepted in Europe as well-nigh absolute. It was enough to defend a point by saying it was according to the doctrine of Aristotle. If Aristotle said so, then it must be so.

An amusing example of Aristotle's hold on the thinking of the time was what happened between Galileo and a metaphysician. One day Galileo asked the metaphysician to look through the telescope into the heavens to see newly discovered heavenly bodies. The metaphysician refused to look through Galileo's telescope saying the Aristotle's writings did not mention such heavenly bodies!

The worship of authority is illustrated also in the case of the philosophy of Aquinas. In the Nineteenth Century the Pope issued a decree declaring the philosophical system of Aquinas the official philosophy of the Roman Catholic world. All Roman Catholic philosophy teachers are expected to subscribe to the system of Aquinas. According to Bertrand Russell in our generation this decree of the

Pope is still very influential in the thinking of Roman Catholic teachers of philosophy. (Incidentally, philosophy books written by Roman Catholic philosophers must have the imprimatur of the Church.) In a broadcast a few years ago over the British Broadcasting Corporation, Bertrand Russell made some remarks which were critical of the philosophy of Aquinas. Shortly afterwards he got a storm of protest from Roman Catholic philosophy teachers.

What I want to point out is that no person holding an exalted office (no matter how exalted the office) has a right by virtue of his high office to dictate that some philosopher's system be the official system of any group of philosophy teachers. One accepts a philosophical system on logical or evidential grounds, but certainly not because some dignitary issues a decree endorsing the system. The person or office of any man does not make a false statement true or a true statement false.

But we must not overlook an important qualification. It is not without worth to cite the opinions of experts, or authorities. By "expert" we mean a person who by reason of many years of study and experience in a special field is qualified more than others to make statements in that field. We give weight to his judgments in his field. Ours is a century of specialization. Gone are the days when one man could acquire depth of knowledge in all the areas of learning. It is now impossible for any man to read in his lifetime all the books written in a given general area of intellectual concern. So whether we like it or not, we must specialize, or else we only scratch the surface. And because we cannot be specialists in several different fields we have to depend for expert opinion on those who have spent many years of study in specific areas. We look up to them as authorities.

But at the same time that we recognize that those who are steeped in a special field are qualified to inform us, the fact must be underscored that the expert is not qualified as an authority outside of his special field. If we violate this principle we commit the fallacy of arguing from authority. The specialist in economics, for instance, is not an authority in music, unless he happens to be also an authority in music. We don't look up to the agriculturist for authoritative judgments in poetry.

In this regard history has shown us some significant examples of intellectual immaturity. The supposed conflict between natural

science and Christian faith is a case in point. In modern times many people have supposed that there is a conflict between natural science and Holy Scripture; many believe the two cannot be reconciled. But is there really a conflict? No. Whatever conflict there is supposed to be is not necessary. Natural science and Holy Scripture can be harmonized. This is not the place or time to discuss that point. What I want to point out here is that a major factor behind the belief that natural science conflicts with Holy Scripture is the fact that some scientists and theologians have committed the mistake of overstepping their special fields. The fact that one is a recognized authority in physics does not qualify him to throw judgments here and there about what the Bible says, unless he himself has spent a good deal of his time in Bible study. Martin Luther committed this mistake when he condemned the heliocentric theory of Copernicus. As a theologian Luther was not qualified to condemn as false the results of Copernicus' astronomical investigations.

#### *The Ability to Communicate*

The intellectually mature person prefers to use simple, ordinary words. He strives to communicate ideas accurately, not to impress his listeners with high-sounding, pompous words and long flowery sentences. If he can say an idea in five words he does not say it in ten.

On the occasion of the burial of Union soldiers at Gettysburg Abraham Lincoln was not the principal speaker. But today people remember what Lincoln said in his short address whereas they can not even recall the name of the principal speaker. There are only 268 words in Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address but they are words that are combined in such a way that they are memorable. They express ideas even non-Americans will not easily forget. The greatness of Lincoln's prose lies in the fact that he used simple ordinary words and short sentences to express great ideas.

But what do we find in much of the writing and speech of Filipino students? High-sounding words, long sentences, often with trivial content, as if our students are ever trying to justify the Filipino's reputation as an orator. Often the Filipino uses fifteen words when eight would suffice. The student who uses pompous words and long flowery sentences is like the radio announcer whose main concern is not to communicate ideas but to impress his listeners.

with his voice or his pronunciation. The listener is left with the conclusion that the announcer is enamored with his voice; he has not been moved to react to what the announcer was saying. The secret of good radio announcing is accurate communication. When we write or speak our purpose is to communicate ideas. The criterion should be how accurately the listener understands and not how he has been impressed with the words we use.

#### *The Desire to Impress*

The intellectually mature person does not speak to give people a better impression of what he knows than is actually the case.

You are familiar with the story of the emperor's new clothes. The emperor engaged magic weavers to weave him a suit. These weavers were such magic weavers that the clothes they made could not be seen except by people who were of low intelligence, dishonest and lazy—intelligent, honest and hard-working people could not see them. Well, the day came when the suit was finished. When he was fitted, the emperor could not see the suit, and that, of course, meant to the emperor that he was intelligent, honest and hard-working. The emperor set a day for a parade around the town. On the day of the parade the people lined the streets to see the emperor in his new clothes. No one saw the suit. And the people were glad they were intelligent, honest and hard-working. It was a child who stated the fact that the emperor had no clothes! The child, you see, was too young to be affected by the desire to impress.

There is an idea that is familiar, that some people who don't understand the better kind of music pay much for concert tickets just so they will be counted among the cultured of the community. They sit there, act as if they enjoy the performance, although they don't understand half of it, and in some cases, are actually bored.

Or there is the case of the person who wants to impress people that he is an intellectual. He talks about deep subjects even to someone who has not gone to high school. He despises religion because it is beneath the dignity of the intellectual. But if you take time to sound him you'll find that in many cases he is really shallow.

#### *The Need for Humility*

The intellectually mature person is willing to have his beliefs examined and criticized and when convinced that they are mistaken

is willing to revise or even abandon them. He upholds the truth even if it hurts him. Pride is the great obstacle in this regard. It takes humility to have one's views dissected and criticized.

In the opinion of D'abro, in his book *The Rise of the New Physics*, it was their lack of modesty that kept the Greeks from discovering the experimental method. Writes D'abro:

The Greeks were perfectly capable of understanding the value of experiment but. . . they did not wish to recognize it. Plainly, the application of the experimental method is not a matter of mere intelligence; it involves in a less conspicuous form other qualities, namely, character, sincerity, and modesty. It requires character to see the truth even when we have reason to fear that it will not be to our liking. It requires sincerity to accept the truth when this truth happens to contradict all that we have previously professed. Finally, it requires modesty to recognize that man cannot, by his inner vision alone, attain to truth and that he must stoop to experiment. Experiment has always been anathema to the egotist, not necessarily because it involves manual labor but because it belittles man.

These qualities of courage, sincerity, and modesty, which the ancients seemed to have lacked, prevented them from creating a science. Thus we find Pythagoras concealing his discovery of irrationals because it upset his doctrine of numbers. . . . And, if Plato by opening a box could have tested his theory of universals, we may be certain he would have destroyed the box rather than run the risk of being refuted.

### *The Open Mind*

The intellectually mature person is willing to examine openly and mindedly any assertions which are contrary or contradictory to his own views. The open-mindedness of the inquiry into the contrary ideas must be emphasized. It is one thing to inquire into a theory with a mind already made up that the contrary theory is wrong—that is intellectual immaturity; it is a different matter to examine the contrary ideas objectively, with no presuppositions conditioning the mind. This of course is by no means easy to do, especially if the contrary ideas threaten convictions one has cherished for a long time. Not that the inquiry into the contrary ideas necessarily results in a change of one's beliefs, not necessarily. Mature inquiry does not imply embracing the new or contrary views. All it implies is an objective, honest study of the evidence and the reasoning involved in the contrary ideas. The modifying of one's own beliefs follows only from having been convinced of the greater justifiability of the

contrary ideas.

It is inevitable that as men continue to experiment and read and think new ideas, new theories arise, some of them tending to destroy ideas that have been received for a long time. That is how mankind expands the frontiers of knowledge. The mature person is alive to new ideas; he studies them open-mindedly; he grows as he studies.

But we often observe the tendency to cling to the old, the familiar, the understood. Somehow there is a reluctance to change; somehow it is easier to doubt new ideas than old ones. There are today many people who refuse to consider objectively the arguments of the new philosophy, the analyst school, insisting that the analyst philosophy is not sound because it destroys metaphysics.

No matter how revolutionary the new ideas may be, no matter how radical, the mature person is willing to study it with an open mind. It is grossly immature to judge a theory before one has thoroughly studied the evidence and the reasoning that supports it.

### *Critical Thinking*

The intellectually mature person listens and reads critically. He does not believe all that the speaker or the book says unless he is convinced that it is true or sound. He evaluates what he hears or reads. It is said of Thomas Hobbes that he spent more time thinking about what he read than reading.

During the retreat of the Silliman faculty and staff last June 2-3 the statement was made by some of the speakers that many students tend to believe whatever they read. Somehow the printed page has an aura of authority. One speaker said that one day he pointed out to his class a statement in their textbook which was questionable. The students believed the book. Just because something is printed is no guarantee it is true or sound. The mature person thinks as he reads or listens.

Perhaps we teachers and students are guilty in this regard. It is an important question whether in our classrooms we don't put more emphasis on memorizing than on understanding and reasoning. (Indeed it is an important question if government examinations do not emphasize memorizing more than reasoning.) Just a few days ago a college teacher told me that he felt frustrated over the fact that his students seldom talk. When he asks thought-provoking questions to get them to react, most of them just keep quiet. College

education must develop in students the critical attitude. We should promote controversy in the classroom. College should be the place where young minds are trained to think. The free expression of ideas must be encouraged. It is in the context of controversy, of exchange, that the mind is sharpened and the judgment disciplined. The college or the university should be turning out thinking graduates and not just memorizing parrots.

### *The Fallacy of Emotion*

The intellectually mature person does not mix emotion with reasoning. He reasons dispassionately, not with the heart but with the head. He rests his case on evidence and logic, not on tears and laughter. He relies on the force of arguments, not on extravagant gestures or a loud voice. When he argues he does not resort to ungentlemanly tactics as making fun of his opponents. You do not win an argument by getting the audience to laugh at your opponent. It is intellectually dishonest to make capital of emotions in an argument. Tears or laughter cannot convert falsehood into truth.

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* we find a classic illustration of the fallacy of capitalizing on emotion. Over the dead body of Julius Caesar, Mark Anthony, using sarcasm and other tricks, incites the crowd to a pitch of anger until they scatter determined to hunt the killers of their hero. It was all a matter of arousing their feelings.

When Socrates was falsely accused he argued his case point by point. When he was sentenced to death, Socrates told the judge

Well, gentlemen, this and perhaps more like this, is about all I have to say in my defense. Perhaps someone among you may be offended when he remembers his own conduct, if he, even in a case of less importance than this, begged and besought the judges with many tears, and brought forward his children to arouse compassion, and many other friends and relatives; whereas I will do none of these things, though I am, apparently, in the greatest danger.... And why shall I not do so? Not because I am stubborn or lack respect for you.... But apart from the question of reputation, gentlemen, I think it is not right to implore the judge or to get acquitted by begging. We ought to inform and convince him. For the judge is not here to give favors in matters of justice, but to give judgment.

Yes, to judge is to "inform and convince". Tears or laughter do not make a fallacious argument valid or a false statement true. It

facts and logical principles that prove or refute. And the mature person does not seek conviction by arousing feelings.

### *The Never-Ending Quest*

The intellectually mature person is never satisfied that he already knows enough. There is never a time when he feels he has arrived intellectually. His thirst for knowledge is never fully satisfied, his questioning for truth never ended.

Referring to teachers a college principal in England expressed this idea this way: "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 teacher is first of all a student; a good part of his time is spent in studying. Graduation from college is not the end of studying, or learning. The mature person is always a student, ever learning new ideas, new facts; ever re-examining beliefs and revising those that need revision; ever seeing new relationships of ideas. The mature person enjoys the adventure of learning.

### *Intellectual Courage*

The intellectually mature is willing to make known his opinion on a given subject even if his judgment is at variance with the opinion of the majority. He is guided by the pertinent evidence and not by what others believe or want him to believe. To him no doctrine or practice is exempt from inquiry just because it has been held by the majority for a long time.

In the June 17, 1962 issue of the *Sunday Times Magazine* the editor laments the fact that we have been "de-humanizing" Rizal. We have painted Jose Rizal as a genius at everything. The editor complains that we have tended to make of Rizal a "god". And he asks, "But who dares write about the faults and weaknesses of Dr. Jose Rizal?" Yes, who dares to make public the negative facets of Rizal's character? Is it because we are afraid of being suspected as Communists if we dare to mention any negative quality or deeds of the national hero? Is it because we are afraid of public opinion? If so, is it because we as a people are so intellectually immature that we easily label a man unpatriotic for talking about the faults and weaknesses of our national hero?

For instance, what was Rizal's religious persuasion? Was he

a Christian? Or an atheist? Or an agnostic? What do we find in Rizal's writings about his religious persuasion? I once heard a lecture by Dean Ricardo Pascual of the University of the Philippines on this subject. His lecture was devoted to showing that Rizal was an agnostic. And Dr. Pascual quoted many passages from Rizal's writings to support his conclusion that Rizal was an agnostic. Was Pascual right? Was Rizal an agnostic? If he was, why don't we mention that fact?

### *The Humility of the Intellectual*

I must not end this lecture without emphasizing the intimate link between intellectual maturity and faith in Jesus Christ. We have seen that humility and integrity are essential to intellectual maturity. It takes humility to admit that one does not know very much. It takes humility to be willing to listen to someone analyze and criticize one's views. It takes humility to admit that one has been mistaken and to revise one's conclusions. It takes humility not to seek to give a better impression of what one knows than is actually the case. It takes integrity to examine open-mindedly views contrary to one's own. It takes integrity to suspend judgment when one cannot justify a conclusion. It takes integrity to acknowledge what one has borrowed from others—it is only dishonest persons who commit plagiarism.

Now the virtues of humility and integrity are not natural to man. The Bible describes the natural man as proud, selfish, jealous, dishonest. And the Bible tells us that it is only when the Spirit of God controls a man's life that he can be humble, honest. It is only by the power that Jesus Christ gives that man can overcome his natural tendency to be proud, selfish, jealous, dishonest. And man being what he is, it is very difficult, if not actually impossible for a man to be intellectually mature apart from the enabling power of Jesus Christ.