
Aurobindo belongs to that generation of Indians whose initial education was western. Later he became aware of his lost heritage and labored mightily to regain it. His works were designed to acquaint his contemporaries with their forgotten heritage. Aurobindo, therefore, did not intend his works for experts in Indian thought; the audience he had in mind was composed of non-professionals. The writer counts himself one in the audience."

Fr. Roque, similarly, “labored mightily to regain his heritage.”

Letters he wrote to me some forty years ago, by now all faded and typed on paper that has turned brittle, which recently have returned to my attention, recall to mind a scene in Fellini’s “Roma” in which a group of miners intrude upon a cave decorated with beautiful frescoes, but as soon as air enters the cave with them, the frescoes fade. Since, notwithstanding the precariousness of their condition, these letters are the closest one could get to an autobiographical memoir by him, I have thought of publishing them. When I broached the matter to him during a recent visit, he said to me I should publish them in full, since they expressed what he truly, honestly thought and felt at the time, and because he really cared about the young person he was writing to... Permit me to share with you excerpts from these letters.

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**Budhi** 2 & 3 ~ 2010
Excerpts from the Letters

1966 June 17 Kiokong [renamed Quezon], Mindanao

After reading your last letters, I think I should tell you as soon as I can about a conviction I have. My conviction is that I must return to teaching philosophy. From the very beginning of my days in Mindanao, this conviction has been in me like a small seed. Since then it has grown into a tree. Any kind of growing is hard to talk about. And this one, I find hard to talk about even to my own self. But it is nonetheless real. I must teach philosophy again....

...I have never felt closer to people than during the past month and a half... If I left Del Monte happily it was because I did not have much work there... I felt superfluous. But I left Wao [Lanao de Sur] with regret—even if it is a terribly isolated place with an atmosphere of suppressed, subtle fear because of the Muslim-Christian tension. And I know I will feel sad when I leave Kiokong. Yet by a paradox, I have never felt more lonely than in the last month and a half. Not poignantly but starkly. The kind of stark loneliness in which black suddenly appears black and white white. And so I was able to see that I have something to say. In some wild moments I think that my saying it can make a difference to our country. But whether it will make a difference or not does not depend on me. It depends on other people and on God who is our Father. But my part is to say it to the fullest extent that I can. I must do this if I am to be loyal to my vocation as a priest. I can see this clearly even if I cannot easily say how or why.

Now, the saying of this, (i.e. of this something I have to say) has to be worked out. The working out can perhaps be best begun while doing parish work. But the deeper working can only be done in an atmosphere where philosophical dialogue is a way of life. At the same time, you know better than any human being that I must grow before I return to
philosophy. Please pray for me that I may be sensitive to the rhythm of God working in me, that I may be loyal to Him.

1966 Sept 9

Your paper [on the philosophy teacher] arrived on one of those cool mornings. I watched the dragonflies in the sunlight while I thought on it. It spoke to me...

These past few weeks have been rather hectic with barrio fiestas and sick calls. It has been very warm and it seems that heat makes many people sick, or have accidents, or shoot, or stab...

Am well, though I feel quite exhausted at times. Ah yez.

1966 Oct 5

I have been doing a lot of thinking about teaching. There are more or less two aspects to preparing a course. The first is the more or less organized reading, thinking, preparing the outline, writing notes. The second is a more or less footloose thinking in which one thinks up and down in and out everywhere. I have not had time for the first, but there are enough odd moments in the day for the second and by an accumulation of infinitesimal amounts, it might yet become something significant. One thing exercising me right now is this: a course in philosophy of man or in ethics should be pertinent to what is going on in science, economics, sociology, etc. There are pitfalls at once, v.g. one might end up giving a course in sociology instead of philosophy. It seems that the κρίσις to be faced is: what is the specifically philosophical looking-at-man? I think this cannot be approached a priori, but rather by entering into the history of thinking-about-man or better of man-thinking-about-himself. Another type of question which might throw light on the κρίσις is: Is there a point at which (e.g.) sociology begins to be an incomplete picture of man?
Another thing exercising me is the old question of our folk values, but in a context of evolution. A common position seems to be that evolution is linear in that each cultural group has to go through an identical process... western nations used to have their own personalistic folk cultures. They lost their personalistic values in the process of industrialization. Now they are worried (during their best moments at least) about how to be personal + industrial as well. So too, according to this way of thinking, we have to lose our folk values, become de-personalized in order to be industrialized. Then when we are industrialized, and only then, do we have a right to start worrying again about personalism.

But I would suggest a different way of looking at it. Evolution does not move forward on one narrow front but on many complexly interacting fronts. We are one of those cultures which have preserved their folk values to a great extent. We are faced with the highly technological western cultures. It seems to me the situation calls for cross fertilization. The challenge to us is to achieve full self-consciousness w/ regard to our personalistic values and simultaneously to develop technological [expertise] expertness, i.e. to create right from the start something never created before: a personal technological culture. This might even interact w/ the west and make them personal once again... I am sure of one thing: no matter where I am sent, I must get a number of insights down in writing and try to have it published. It will be a modest effort but I hope it will be competent. I am beginning slowly (oh so slowly) to be reconciled with my limitations. The thing now is to make them go as far as they can go.

1967 Feb 6 Cagayan de Oro

Your classmate from [Ateneo de] Tuguegarao and [Ateneo de Manila]... has come here. He seems to be an old friend of Fr. Cebrero because he allows him to live here
at the convento. It seems that he is trying to get a job with the Del Monte people. He reminds me of another classmate of yours. Brilliant and superficial, yet he seems to impress himself as deep and balanced.

Last Friday at about three P.M., one of the workmen fell from the roof of the welder’s shed to the concrete floor of the church. A fellow workman picked him up and rushed him to a jeep to the hospital. Another man knocked at Fr. Cebrero’s door. I was nearby, heard, grabbed the oils and we rushed to the hospital. O My God! Terrible! He still had pulse and heartbeat. I prayed into his ear and absolved and anointed. Then Fr C arrived and told me to stand guard. So I stood at his head. The doctors gave dextrose, just a gesture in a hopeless situation but it was good of them to make the gesture. At least two other workmen stood guard. And there was the usual crowd of men women children which always materializes in the emergency room whenever something horrible happens. In about half an hour his heart stopped beating. Later Fr C sent me to the funeral parlor to see if his wallet was in his pocket. The embalming room was small and close. The embalmers could find nothing in his pockets.

Then there was a sick call. A child at Rex Tavern. The parents wanted a priest to bless him (one year old because he has been long sick). The road to the sea. Sand on both sides, the kind that is under water during high tide. Mangrove trees on your right, on your left just sand, a tall radio tower, a small radio shed, a raised road leading to Rex Tavern, a nightclub, not swanky or sleazy, just nondescript. The owner is glad to see the priest and leads him to the second floor to the bedroom where the child is. Then he and his wife offer me a cup of coffee (how good it tasted!) and a glass of water. The water seemed to taste of blood; perhaps a psychological projection as I had been smelling so much blood that afternoon. And so it was good to go out to the small sand wilderness, look at the distant mangrove,
the low grey clouds and feel the clean salt wind.

Since Victor [the man who fell] (that is his name) has no people [relatives] in Cagayan [de Oro], he used to sleep at the convento. And he has been lying in state in the cursillo room downstairs since last Friday night. This morning, as I was vesting for Mass I heard weeping (his father had arrived from Bohol) not hysterical, just a low steady moan of sorrow that could no longer be held back. Later he said, “Pait ang kasingkasing ko kay namatay siya sa inyong trabaho. My heart is bitter that he died in your work. He was never lazy, but I never asked him to climb coconut trees because I was afraid he would fall. But your work...”; he looked up at the construction. I had always thought it exciting to say Mass in a half-finished church with half finished walls and less than half-finished roof. One is close to wind rain and sun. And as I looked up at the scaffolding, the unfinished roof, the sky, I felt them as promises, fresh, young. But now how cruel everything seemed.

1967 Feb 27 San Isidro Church, Kadingilan

This is my last day here. Only three weeks and already it is sad to leave. Here is a kind of Bukidnon terrain I have not seen before. The north is plateaus and canyons. The south is more or less level at the highway until you [are] near Cotabato when it becomes mountains. The Kiokong area is steep mountains with uplands in the farther barriess. Pangantucan and Kalilangan are high arched hills. Kadingilan is uplands that sweep and down in wide curves. This area used to be dense forest until recently. Now it is planted fields strewn with burnt logs and stumps and punctuated by relics of the forest, tall mast-like trees, like exclamation points (to use your metaphor). Of all the places I have been, here is a feeling of distances, of being surrounded by far places. The sky is endless. Sometimes it is all wind; the trees swim in it. Sometimes it shakes with the laughter of hunchbacked clouds. Sunsets have a
gente magnificence. I remember one evening in particular because we had to go to the rice mill to change our umay [husked rice] into bugas [unhusked rice]. The sun sets behind a far low lying ridge in the direction of Lanao del Sur (of my old friend Wao in fact.) This evening the sky above it was translucent pastels in blue, gold, green, red, and the evening star was a blue light. Later the sky became one soft dense red and the evening star all shining...

In this job of substituting for parish priests, one can sense the personality of the priest he is replacing from the way the people deal with him. Here the people speak and sing with the priest quite enthusiastically during the liturgy. Also they come to see the priest at all hours and deal with him quite easily and spontaneously. I remember in particular two of the people who came here. One was an old man. He had just moved from Cebu because “mangita akog maayong kinabuhi”; “I am looking for a better life.” He was thin, strong, of the same burnt brown-red color as the soil of these uplands. The other was an old woman who came with a gift of vegetables for the priest. When she said she was taga-Benguet, I spoke in Ilocano and we had quite a talk. There are many Igorots in Bukidnon and the ones I have met know Ilocano and are very glad to speak it even with one who speaks it as badly as I do. But the reason these two people are strong in my memory is not because of what they said, but because of their faces and the air about them. I think Chesterton says somewhere that only the really old are new and beautiful. This old man and this old woman were new and beautiful...

You know, I felt so leisurely here that I even had time to be arty. Last Saturday night, the convento boys (there are three) all went to the barrio dance (there seems to be one every Saturday). I was all alone, so I took Fr. [Alfonso] Flores’ stereo and sat on the porch while I listened to Mozart and Brahms and watched the brilliant moonlight touch Bukidnon into all kinds of meanings.
1967 April 7

As my year in Mindanao ends, things are taking on that sharpness and vividness that they have when one thinks he might die. I guess every good-bye is a kind of dying (corny but still true) followed perhaps by resurrection?

1968 Feb 2 Pasay

There is a kind of tenseness here because of the news from Vietnam and Korea. And, as if that were not enough, Taal is erupting again. I am gathering some clippings and will mail them to you on Monday. While walking in Padre Faura yesterday, I looked around at the buildings and a morbid question came to me: Must all of these be destroyed again? But all around people were going about their business as usual. The old Filipino resilience to try, as much as one can, to go about one's business as usual, even in times of helpless fear. It was in such a time that my young self and those that were young with me discovered what a new and fresh world the Filipino consciousness is (Though we could not have put it in those terms.) And I was looked on as an odd guy for liking Greek so much. But I was discovering a new world—so alive—and the strange characters were alive too. Also around this time I discovered a motto which I think I have quoted in class: “Live as if you will die tomorrow; study as if you will live forever.” This was said by a monk when Europe was being rocked by wave after wave of barbarian invasions. Were it not for the patient work of hundreds of monks like him, so much of what is good and civilized in man would have been lost to us. God bless us all, all those we love, and all men. All is hidden in His love for us...

4 July 1969 La Ignaciana, 2503 Taft Ave. Ext., Pasay City

[Let me] tell you now of the trip to Ilocos... The rains had come and this is the first time I saw the Ilocos so green.
The mountains that looked so red from Bantay [Ilocos Sur; where I was born] the time we went there and also last January, had now that bluish greenish hue you mentioned in your letter. Stayed overnight in one of the barrios in Sto. Domingo [Ilocos Sur; hometown of the Solivens — Benito Soliven, Max’s father and Louie David’s grandfather] and the next day when I went “nga agmula ti laya” [literally, when I went to plant ginger, an Ilocano euphemism “to go to the toilet”], it seems their water-sealed toilet was five years old and some of the timbers were weak and I was too heavy, to make a long story short, naabut ni father [father fell in]. And so I became the talk of the barrio....

Relax, Luvin. One cannot always live life at a high pitch of metaphysical intensity. Besides the profound, there is also the corny. And what would life be without corn? Unbearable! The [reflective] reflexchi enriches the [non-reflective] irreflexchi. But when the point is reached that the [reflective] begins to become so intense as to forget to laugh, then it is time to let the [non-reflective] irreflexchi leap in all its spontaneousness. Chesterton said that what is worth doing well is worth doing badly. And if in the limitedness of one’s talent, one can only do badly what is worth doing well, then let him rejoice in the badness thereof. As the same fat sage also said, “life is too serious to be taken seriously.”

This year I have an experimental project of teaching one class in Junior year and another in Senior year the core curriculum with Pilipino as the medium of instruction and discussion. The texts and readings are still in English. Here with all joy I will do badly what is worth doing well. And who knows, might not joy change the doing badly into well done in the end?”
1974 July 1 Pasay

I was so glad to hear that you are working on Ricoeur. M[erleau]-Ponty is worthwhile, but for an all-out effort like a dissertation, Ricoeur has much more to give. I do think the college needs something more structured than pure phenomenology. In the 60's some students "instinctively" put intuition [insight] and flexible conceptualization together. But that breed seems to be decreasing. And there seems to be an increase of phoney "intuitionistes" who are sure they have the truth because they "feel" it so strongly. Hence the need of something more structured and, yes, more conceptual. I was thinking of Fallible Man for Phil[osophy] of Man. But I think it is much too intricate for beginners. Do you know anything by R[icoeur] which is shorter and less intricate? Last semester I tried to use parts of [The Symbolism of Evil] La Symbolique du mal for Ethics, but I am not sure if it was worthwhile. I will do more evaluating and ask Ediboy, who was in that class, what his opinion is.

I think the Ethics course is the most challenging. To give a course that will enable the student to "realize (mamulatan-matauhan)" the basics of ethics: v.g. that there is such a thing as intrinsically human -- that even if we cannot define this clearly, we can truly "see" it or have a "kagat" to it. (The "morsure" metaphor is really from Marcel.) In other words, to see that the relativity of ethics is always a strict and precise relativity to an absolute—to God, really; that there is always a moment of yes or no; that there is such a thing as moral evil. All this is so true, it's corny. But so many do not see because—I fear — they do not want to see....

...Writing a dissertation is exasperating. But it is worthwhile. It is too serious to be taken too seriously. Giving up is one form of taking it seriously.
What Has this Got to Do with Meron?

But first an insight after rereading some of the letters. God loves us selflessly. The way God loves is not for himself but for ourselves. God’s love is not possessive. We become God-like, like God when we love like him—selflessly. But of course, this is difficult for us human beings. We like to bind the people we love.

What has this to do with Meron?

On page 11 of *Pambungad sa Metapisika*, Fr. Roque writes:

Ano ang meron? Magturo ka nga at magpahiwatig; nguni’t ibang uring pagturo at pagpahiwatig. Sapagka’t walang makapagbubukas ng landas nang makapasok ako sa abot tanaw ng meron dahil sa nasa loob na, pinapalisiran na ako at tinatablan, binubuhay at inaakit ng meron. Walang labas ang abot tanaw ng meron; o, kung gusto mo, walang tunay na labas ang meron. Ang maari lamang mangyari ay baka ako matauhan na nasa meron na nga pala ako. At magtataka ako na lalo pala itong mahlwaga kaysa inaakala ko.

Here he is writing from within the experiences of the people he is writing for.

On Page 15:

Ang pananaliksik sa meron ay pagtawag ng pansin sa mga nangyayari araw araw, nguni’t hindi pinapansin; pagpukaw ng malay tao sa mga lihim na ginaganap sa mga looban ng mismong malay tao. Pinagsisikapan nating isipin, ang sumasakop sa mismong pag-iiisp. Para bagang ibig nating makita ang lahat; pati na ang ating sariling paningin.

There are as many Ferriols-es as there are people who love him. People who did not know Fr. Ferriols in the early sixties will have to summon their creative imagination to see and believe that the “Apo” (as he used to be fondly called) used to go to class wearing ankle-length black boots and dark-rimmed glasses (like Ninoy Aquino's). Fr. Ferriols had not yet taken to heart T. S. Eliot's line “I grow old. I grow old. I shall wear my trousers rolled.” Some days, he even looked impeccable in his newly-pressed white soutane.

At this time (1962), he felt secure without his umbrella and bag. His Ilocano sounded Greek to me; and yes, his Greek Ilocano to me. His fiery temper had not yet become legendary. When his students sank into dogmatic slumber, he rudely awakened them. Before he became regarded as an “institution” walking on campus, he struck everyone as a regular genius (to quote the noble historian, Horacio de la Costa, the only “true genius in the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus”) who smoked Camel cigarettes and enjoyed a few drinks.

Called “Totoy” by his mother, Modesta Jamias (who lived to be 104 and who was one of the first nurses in our country), his father, Vicente Garcia Ferriols, a veterinarian who lived to be 86, and his three sisters (all religious)—Sister Cyrilda who passed away in 2001, Sister Cristinamaria and Sr. Asuncion Marie (now a Pink Sister in Tagaytay); called “Roc” by his high school classmate, Fr. Arevalo in the 1941 High School yearbook, he is “Apo” to those who claim roots in the Ilocos and “Padre” to his present students. He is all of these and more.

For me, Fr. Ferriols is a father-teacher, a priest, and a Jesuit. First, a father-teacher. I first met Fr. Ferriols as a 17 year-old sophomore at the Ateneo; he was 37 at the time. He taught me, a Humanities major, nearly all my philosophy — the four History of Ideas classes (Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary), Ontology, Philosophy of Religion, Gabriel Marcel, Teilhard de Chardin, Søren Kierkegaard, Indian Philosophy, the Greek classics. He fired my imagination, gifted me with the passion for philosophy, and inspired me to dedicate my life to philosophy. Like Morrie in Tuesdays with Morrie, he saw me as “a raw but precious thing, a jewel that with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine.” He believed in me and continues to believe in me.

He not only taught me but, as a father, he fought to create a space for me in the Ateneo. Just before graduation in May 1965, Fr. Ferriols, then Philosophy Department Chair, wanted to hire me to
teach philosophy. He sought the approval of Fr. James F. Donelan, then Dean, who disapproved of my being hired on the grounds I was just too young and too short (I was barely five feet tall at the time; Fr. Donelan, who was over six feet tall, thought I wouldn't be credible before the students). Fr. Ferriols didn't take "no" for an answer. He appealed to the Rector-President, Fr. Francisco Araneta who also said "no." Undaunted, Fr. Ferriols brought the case to Fr. Horacio de la Costa, then newly appointed first Filipino Provincial who finally gave in. (Hiring procedures in the Ateneo have changed in the meantime).

There is one other instance in which Fr. Ferriols struggled to literally reserve a space for me and for my parents. Just after my graduation, my parents and I were returning to Tuguegarao. Fr. Ferriols and Fr. Jose A. Cruz (who later became Ateneo University President, but who was at the time teaching philosophy) offered to drive us to the Rural Transit bus terminal near the Bonifacio Monument in Caloocan. To reserve seats for us in the bus, (no air-conditioned buses at the time) which went on a first come-first served basis, Fr. Ferriols tucked the lower part of his soutane and ran alongside the arriving bus and clambered up the window, head first, legs dangling out. Later we saw Fr. Ferriols and Fr. Cruz (in their soutanes) standing on the roof of the bus, arranging and tying our luggage. I will forever remember the two figures silhouetted against the setting sun.

Early on, I caught a glimpse of Fr. Ferriols's priestliness. In July 1964, I invited him to visit my family in Tuguegarao. He stayed in the convento with his cousin, the late Mons. Ricardo Jamias, then parish priest; my older brother who was then a secular priest was one of Mons. Jamias's assistants. During his stay, I accompanied Fr. Ferriols to give Extreme Unction to a dying child, and then to a dying policeman. After that, he cut short his stay to immediately go on a retreat. He wrote in a letter dated 7 July 1964:

You asked me once why I changed my plans and decided to make my retreat right away. I said I might tell you sometime. Here it is: when I was blessing that dead child, I saw something very clearly. I am simple enough to think that this clear-seeing is from God and I feel I must be alone with Him as soon as possible. Perhaps He has something more to show me; perhaps there is nothing more, perhaps
I just have to stand silent before Him. I simply have to look for Him once more in the silence.

Fr. Ferriols is not only a father-teacher and a priest. He is also a son of Ignatius of Loyola who constantly inspires him to live and become “large-minded, courageous, compassionate, of good judgment, energetic in understanding and in seeing tasks to completion and above all, closely united with God Our Lord and intimate with Him in prayer and all activities.” He is a true descendant of a group of companions in the Lord, pioneers of a human adventure that strives to promote the glory of God by exalting the goodness of all creation.