

## **Philequity Corner (October 1, 2012)**

**By Wilson Sy**

### **Beyond Ateneo**

Last September 21, 2012, Manuel V. Pangilinan (MVP) wrote a letter to Ateneo president Fr. Jett Villarin, declaring his “complete and total disengagement from the Ateneo.” In the letter, MVP cited irreconcilable differences with the school, particularly on the issues of the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill and mining, as the reasons behind his decision. MVP’s letter was shortly followed by the resignation of Fr. Ben Nebres, former president of Ateneo, as an independent director of PLDT.

### **Untimely Parting**

MVP’s sudden decision to part with his alma mater came as a shock to the Ateneo community, considering that MVP had been one of the school’s staunchest supporters and most generous benefactors. It also comes at a peculiar time since the UAAP Final Four had just started and the Ateneo Blue Eagles are in the midst of their quest for their 5<sup>th</sup> straight championship.

The recent string of events prompted Ateneo Blue Eagles head coach Norman Black to also contemplate resignation, considering his ties with MVP. Fortunately for Ateneo, MVP graciously rejected Black’s resignation and said that the team should not suffer from his decision to disengage from Ateneo.

### **Comments from the Directors of Philequity**

Since MVP was one of Ateneo’s key supporters and prime patrons, we wanted to get the sentiments of the Philequity directors regarding the Ateneo-MVP split. Among those who studied in UAAP schools, there are 6 from Ateneo, 4 from Lasalle and 1 each from UP, FEU and UST. Below, we summarize some of the comments, reactions and opinions of our directors.

**Director from Ateneo:** *I am extremely grateful for what MVP has done for Ateneo, the Philippine stock market, the economy and the country. I admire the dedication and the selflessness that he has displayed in fighting for the causes that he believes in. MVP has shown utmost loyalty to his school and country. I believe that he is an excellent example of what it truly means to be an Atenean and a Filipino.*

**Director from Ateneo:** *I am saddened by the news since I have the utmost respect and admiration for both MVP and the Ateneo. In the end, I do believe that the differences, while understandable, are not irreconcilable. I believe that MVP and the Ateneo have more principles and beliefs in common than differences. I believe that both will gravitate towards reconciliation --- hopefully sooner than later.*

**Director from Ateneo:** *Parting between organizations and people who head them can be painful for both sides, especially when they have an air of inevitability and finality. But it’s always helpful to look back on the good times and long years together. In this case there are even actual buildings to serve as reminders of generosity and goodwill. Even in such parting of ways, the good memories will surely endure after the emotion of the moment. I*

*think it's best to move on with only positive thoughts. Both organizations will survive. Anyway, there was no third party involved here.*

**Director from Lasalle:** *It is unfortunate that the principle of compromise seems to have been sacrificed in this issue. I have read the Jesuit position paper on mining and there is nothing written inconsistent with what could be expected of such a religious order, unless I may have missed some back-channeling or deeper disagreements that occurred between MVP and the Jesuits. What in fact stands out in the last part is their exhortation for an "atmosphere of respectful dialogue" among all contending interests. The split between MVP and Ateneo benefits no one, not even a LaSallite like me.*

**Director from Lasalle:** *I support MVP in his advocacy for responsible corporate mining. Regretfully, harsh judgment is being passed on the mining industry in total disregard of empirical evidence that responsible corporate mining has been an asset to society. Cold objective facts should be the basis of judgment, but this is not the case on the judgment passed on the mining industry.*

**Director from Lasalle:** *Since I am not from Ateneo, I really don't know the side of the Jesuits. I did read MVP's letter, which I must say was very well-written. I can feel the pain and feeling of betrayal that was in the letter. I think the Jesuits should just stick to what they do best --- educating. However, I understand that this is a very complicated matter and I am sure Ateneo had reasons for doing what they did.*

#### **Comment from the Research Team**

We would also like to publish the reaction of our Research Team, which is composed of 4 people from Ateneo, 2 from UP and 1 from Lasalle. The team's opinion is summarized below.

*We regard MVP as an exceptional Atenean. He is an executive who has shown diligence not only in managing his corporate affairs but also in helping his school and country.*

*We understand Ateneo's obligation to support and defend the views of the Catholic Church. However, we are surprised about Ateneo's lack of support for one of its most ardent supporters. We are shocked to see how easy it was for the school and its faculty to openly oppose the advocacies of a distinguished Atenean, who also happens to be a former chairman of its Board of Trustees.*

*We also find it unfortunate that the setbacks that Philex Mining recently experienced are being used to cast a blanket of ignorance over the bigger picture. While broadcast and social media have been obsessed about news on leakages and fines, it seems that no one has brought up the benefits that responsible mining companies can provide to the society.*

#### **Beyond Ateneo**

What has happened recently is clearly beyond Ateneo, the school. The crux of the matter is about the conviction, principles and causes that MVP ultimately fights for.

MVP's love of country, patriotism and broad international perspective gave him the conviction that the RH bill is needed for the country to prosper. For MVP, the RH Bill aims to educate the masses about reproductive health and responsible parenthood while giving them a choice on how to plan their families. He believes that this will allow the poor to get better education for their children, improve their

access to services and uplift their overall standard of living. This will allow the poor to better take care of themselves and will ultimately be beneficial to our country.

MVP also believes that responsible mining can actually be done in the country. He sees the potential of harnessing the country's abundant natural resources in order to create more jobs for Filipinos, bring foreign exchange to the country and generate more taxes for the government. He firmly believes that all these can be done while properly identifying and managing the risks associated with mining.

In supporting these causes, we see that MVP is deeply concerned about things that are beyond his own school and his own personal agenda. We see him as someone who has used his success to genuinely help our country and the Filipino people.

### **Win or Lose, It's the School We Choose**

On the one hand, we greatly appreciate the selflessness that MVP has shown in dedicating significant time, effort and resources to his advocacies. On the other hand, we also respect the stand of the Catholic Church, Ateneo and other parties on the RH bill and mining. Despite this, we cannot help but deeply empathize with MVP. Somehow, we can relate to his frustration, hurt and disappointment due to the lack of support from his alma mater at a time when he needs it the most.

We think that MVP's exodus will be a significant loss for the Ateneo community. Fr. Villarín's letter to the Ateneo community eloquently summarizes our feelings about the MVP-Ateneo split. Below is an excerpt from his letter.

*"As we accept this decision with sadness, we honor it with profound respect. Through the years, MVP's presence and support in various capacities have helped the Ateneo achieve its mission and deepen its identity. Let us continue to accord him the gratitude and respect he deserves as an exceptional alumnus and leader."*

Even with MVP's departure, we will continue to show our support for the school through various ways. We are confident that Ateneo will remain as one of the best schools in the country. We are also confident that Ateneo will continue to fulfill its mandate of educating men and women who will strive for excellence and bring positive change to the society.

We'd like to end this article with a song that MVP and the entire Ateneo community sing after each UAAP basketball game. Below is a stanza from the alma mater hymn of Ateneo.

*Down from the hill, down to the world go I;  
Remembering still, how the bright Blue Eagles fly.  
Through joys and tears, through the laughing years,  
We sing our battle song:  
Win or lose, it's the school we choose;  
This is the place where we belong!*

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