

Roda, Alfonso Panis (1921–1987)

REYNALDO L. MAGLIPAS

Reynaldo L. Maglipas hails from Salcedo Eastern Samar, Philippines. He finished his elementary and high school education in his birthplace. He earned his Bachelor of Theology at Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP). After graduation, he worked in the Central Luzon Conference, Manila, Philippines, as a church and district pastor. Currently, he serves as the associate pastor of the Philippine International Church at AUP. He is pursuing a D.Min. at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS). He is married to Sunbeam Love E. Maglipas, with whom he has three children.

Alfonso Panis Roda was president of Philippine Union College.

Early Life

Alfonso Panis Roda was born on December 25, 1921, although his birth was not registered until a month later. He was the fourth of five children born to Leon Zumel Roda of Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, and Maria R. Panis of Santa Ana, Manila, in the Philippines. Leon, Maria, and Maria's brother, Bibiano R. Panis, were among the first eleven members baptized into the faith in the Philippines in 1911. Leon and Bibiano, along with Emilio Manalaysay, were the first three Adventist ministers to be ordained in the Philippines by L. V. Finster.¹ Raised in an Adventist home from birth, Alfonso Roda accepted the Adventist faith early in life and was baptized in the Baesa River.

Three of Leon's younger brothers, Alvaro, Antonino, and Bartolome, were also baptized Seventh-day Adventists. Tata Alvaro and Tata Tony, as they were fondly called by their nephews and nieces, soon became preachers and were ordained as Adventist ministers. Another brother, Tata Sergio, did not convert and remained in the Roman Catholic faith, although close ties were maintained between Catholic and Adventist Roda kin. Of Tata Sergio's four daughters, two entered a convent of the Religious of the Virgin Mary and retired after many years of faithful service to their church. Alvaro Zumel Roda was the father of David and Prospero Roda, both physicians, and Antonino Zumel Roda became the father of Samuel (also a physician) and Peter Roda²

Nicknamed Ponsing, Alfonso Roda was only 4 years old when his father died, leaving a young, 28-year-old widow, Maria Panis Roda, with five little children to support. The eldest, Eduardo, known as Arding, was only ten.

Education and Marriage

Alfonso obtained his early education mostly at Pasay Church School, except for one year when his family moved to Sarrat, Ilocos Norte. He completed his intermediate and high school education at Philippine Union College (PUC) in Baesa where he graduated in 1938.³ He enrolled commerce program right after his high school graduation while working in the business office under the supervision of Basilio Bautista. He graduated in 1940

with the Associate in Commercial Science certification and was soon called to work at the Philippine Union Office in Pasay. During his spare time at work, he took some subjects at PUC. After the Japanese attacked the Philippines in 1941, he continued to work at the union office which was later moved to Binan, Laguna, in 1944. Sometime later, he was called to be an acting treasurer at the South-Central Luzon Mission in Lucena.

In 1946, Roda graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Philippine Union College. Soon after graduation, he accepted a call to teach at the West Visayan Academy where he stayed for one year. Wanting to advance his education, he went to the United States and enrolled at Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University). To support his studies, he worked at a gas station and harvested grapes.

In 1947, Roda was awarded a Master's degree in religion. After he received his degree, he returned to the Philippines where he sensed he was called to work. Joining the PUC faculty, he taught history and eventually became the head of the history department at PUC. After several years, he returned to Andrews University where he attained his Bachelor's degree in divinity in 1962. After this graduation, he returned to the Philippines to once again teach.

In 1965, Roda was elected president of Philippine Union College. After one term as president, he was sent to the United States to pursue an Ed.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles. He completed his doctoral degree in 1972 and returned to the Philippines where he again served as president of PUC. Under his leadership, PUC moved from Baesa to Silang. When the project floundered for a while and He coined the campaign slogan "Save Our Silang" or "SOS" when the project encountered financial difficulty and, with his wife, personally visited PUC alumni and friends in the United States and Canada to raise funds for the project.

Alfonso P. Roda was united in holy matrimony to Lydia M. Tabucol at Pasay English church on October 20, 1953. He fathered three boys: Ferdinand Jonathan (Andy), a physician in Ohio; Ralph Reginald, who died at an early age from terrible accident; and Reginald Todd (Bong), who finished a BSN degree from PUC and immigrated to the United States with his mother. The two surviving sons had fond memories of their father. Whenever their father was away from home on special occasions, such as Lydia's birthday, he would request Bong kiss his mother on his father's behalf. Consequently, Bong became known as the official family kisser. When Andy was about 3 or 4 years old, his parents had a quarrel in which he was the go-between. His dad asked him to tell his mom that he was sorry, which broke the ice, and thus restored peace and harmony in the household. From that time on, Andy served as "Ambassador for Uniting Nations."⁴

Ministry

Excluding the three-and-a half years of doctoral study in educational administration at the University of California, Los Angeles, from 1969 to 1972, Roda functioned as president of his *alma mater* from 1965 to 1987. He was elected president of Philippine Union College for the first time at age 44. His sixth four-year term began in December 1985 and ended prematurely when he died in early March 1987. No less than eight presidents (more

than ten acting presidents are counted) succeeded him in the office over the next twenty years⁵

Roda was recipient of awards, citations, and plaques of recognition from organizations such as Philippine Union College, the Association of Christian Schools and Colleges (ASCS), the Far Eastern Division, and the General Conference for his whole-hearted support of Christian education.⁶ He was also a member of entities promoting the quality improvement of education such as the Coordinating Council for Private Education, the executive board of the ASCS, the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines, and the Adventist Board of Higher Education. Through his leadership and influence, PUC received accreditation for academic excellence by several agencies such as the ASCS, the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities, and the Adventist Accrediting Association. Roda was noted for his courage and integrity of character as an administrator. He stood for the right even when he was alone. He was an open-minded, cool-headed, and humble role model of simple living, and a faithful and regular participant in religious activities.⁷ Dr. Alfonso P. Roda served for nearly 22 years as PUC's president.

On February 25, 1987, Alfonso P. Roda was admitted to the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital (now Adventist Medical Center Manila), suffering from a severe headache and vomiting. Two days later, he underwent a surgical procedure to place a ventriculostomy and was also placed on a respirator.⁸ On March 5, 1987, at exactly 6:35 a.m., his respirator was removed and he was pronounced dead twenty minutes later by Dr. Celedonio A. Fernando, his attending physician. Roda was laid to rest on March 8.⁹

Contribution

Under Roda's presidency, Philippine Union College underwent a complete transformation. On the old campus in Baesa, PUC's enrollment reached 1,500 students in 1967. The Bachelor of Science in Foods and Nutrition program, which opened in 1953, was granted government recognition the same year.¹⁰

In 1976, construction began on the new campus in Silang. The first buildings included the motor pool complex (1976) and cafeteria (1977). By 1978, the ladies' dormitories, Cadena and Sampaguita, were completed as well as the administration building, the Center for Graduate Studies, the store, and the elementary building, which was initially occupied by the seminary. Apartments A, B, C, and D were ready for occupancy in 1979. Roda financed some construction through the financial aid and moral support of the alumni, not only in the Philippines but also in the United States and Canada.¹¹

The graduate school, with forty-two students, moved to the new campus in 1978. The graduate religion program was separated from the college and recognized as a theological seminary by the Far Eastern Division after its transfer to Silang. By 1986, the seminary was renamed the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (AIAS), and in 1991, it was moved to another location. Its facilities, such as Finster Hall and the seminary building, were turned over to PUC. In 1978, a church building was constructed and the congregation adopted the name Silang Heights Church. When all of the collegiate programs moved to the campus in 1981, this

congregation and the Philippine Union College church merge to form the Philippine International Church.¹²

By 1980, the college gymnasium, PUC Academy, Modular 1 (originally used as the administration building and renamed Mahogany Hall in 2016), and Modular 2 (renamed Acacia Hall in 2016) were completed. Over the next four years are the Elena T. Corpus Hall (1982, known as the Education building), the business building (1983), the science building (1984), and the health services building (1984) were completed.¹³

The organization of student singing groups Became very popular in the 1980s. Notable groups included the Celestial Echoes (1982), the Zyphers (1986), the Singing Knights (1986), the Evangel Chorale (1988), and the Regent Square Chorale (1988).¹⁴

In 1983, the Graduate School opened the Master in Public Health program. Two years later, the Master of Science in Nursing was offered, catering to a new era of graduate programs in Allied Health.¹⁵ Ground was broken in 1984 for the John Lawrence Detwiler Memorial Library. It was completed three years later in 1987. Other construction projects at this time included the completion of the science building, the Molave Dormitory in 1985 (third floor completed in 1987), the Alfonso P. Rhoda Alumni Center in 1988, the university swimming pool in 1991, and the Student Association Building in 1994.¹⁶ The entire campus was enclosed by a fence in 1987.

Roda's contribution to PUC/AUP was recognized when the school was awarded "Most Outstanding Tertiary Institution for Region IV, besting thirty other colleges and universities in the region in 1985. In 1986, the tertiary student population reached 2,000.¹⁷

SOURCES

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1. Consuelo R. Jackson, *The Gift of Choice: The Lives and Times of Leon Zumel Roda and Alfonso P. Roda* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, Inc., 2003).

2. Ban Alsaybar, *Pursuing the Vision, Mini Biographies of the First Principals and Presidents* (Los Angeles, CA: n. p., 2006).
3. Certificate of appreciation presented by PUC School of Graduates Studies and International Institute of Health on March 24, 1991.
4. Alsaybar, 41.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 42.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 42-43.
10. Jackson, 316-317.
11. Maria Tumangday, former vice president for academic affairs during the time of Dr. Alfonso Roda, interview by author.
12. Jackson, 316-317.
13. Ibid., 317.
14. Ibid., 169.
15. Ibid., 312-313.
16. Ibid., 169.
17. Adventist University of the Philippines Chronology document, accessed April 18, 2021, <http://www.aup.edu.ph/alumni/wp-content/uploads/CHRONOLOGYtext.docx>.

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