

# ★ *lasalliana*

15 - 16 – D - 28

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF SECRETARY

**LOURDES R. QUISUMBING**

**at the Elevation of La Salle College, Bacolod to  
University Status and the Investiture  
of Brother Rolando R. Dizon, FSC as the  
First President of the University  
of St. La Salle, July 5, 1988**

On July 5th 1988, La Salle College, Bacolod, in the Philippines was raised to the status of a University. Brother Rolando R. Dizon was invested as the first President of the University of St. La Salle. The keynote address was given by the Secretary of Education, Culture and Sports, Secretary Lourdes Quisumbing.

In the latter part of her speech, Secretary Lourdes Quisumbing showed her great admiration for and understanding of the lasallian educational tradition.

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... In my short encounter with the Lasallian tradition, several impressions have embedded in my consciousness. I found out that Saint John Baptist de la Salle was the proclaimed patron saint of all teachers by our universal church. Being a teacher myself, it was easy for this fact to stay in my mind. We had our very own patron saint who will intercede for us teachers! However, as I began to study the life of this saint, I began to be struck by his life and work. First of all, I was struck that this French gentleman was able to overcome the strong group bias of his society towards the bourgeoisie and the nobility when he committed himself to work for the education of the children of the working class and the poor, and to live with the teachers which he considered, as he himself wrote, as having a lower status than his personal valet! Second, I was struck that he was able to decide to work as an elementary school teacher even after he received his doctorate in theology. Third I was struck that he was able to see that salvation for his students meant both teaching them skills so that they can find work and inculcating in them the life-giving truths and values of Jesus Christ. To him, there was no dichotomy!

Given this brief sketch of what little I know about him whom you have named your university after, what are its implications for your university especially as they pertain to the threefold agenda of our government? Firstly, to be true to his name, you will have to be a university that serves the working class and the poor of Negros by making the university accessible to them. You will have to fight and resist against the temptation to turn your institution into a university for the elite for the sake of academic excellence. The orientation to serve the working class and the poor does not mean that you will have to sacrifice academic excellence. The real challenge for you is to be a university that genuinely serves the working class and the poor without becoming a mediocre university. Mediocrity has no room in an authentic educational service of the poor. This is your particular contribution towards participatory democracy and social justice.

Secondly, Saint La Salle was concerned about the welfare of children. Any institution who bears his name can do no less. Your programs and your degrees, your researches and your projects should have a particular focus towards the well-being of the children of Negros. On this line, I would like to personally commend the work of your Social Research Center which has placed itself at the service of the government's efforts towards the social transformation of Negros, and the undergraduate and graduate programs in education even when it is certainly not profitable to do so! I hope that your university can become the center of a vibrant renaissance in social research and teacher education for the Visayas region. Such will be a significant contribution to the building of a just and humane society as envisioned by our Constitution.

Thirdly, Saint La Salle was concerned that the

children be taught to lead good lives by instructing them with the life-giving truths and values of Jesus Christ and by giving them suitable education. In our modern parlance, we would say that he was very much concerned with values education. Today, our young people are being bombarded by values which present a distorted version of the good life. Your university must put all her resources to help counteract this cultural domination of the minds and hearts of our young people. We need your skills, your knowledge, your expertise to help fashion a new Filipino educational paradigm that can retrieve the wisdom of our national cultural heritage as well as to fashion a Christian education where the teachings of Jesus are embodied in the cultural tradition of our people. To do these, it is important for us to be functional in our own national language because language is the best tool we have to decode the insights hidden within our cultural heritage. Remember that Saint La Salle fought for the right to teach the children in their own native French when it was the accepted custom to use Latin as the medium of instruction.

Simply, I am asking you as your Secretary of Education to be faithful to your tradition, the tradition of Saint La Salle. Education after all, is simply the drawing out of insights necessary for the continuing growth of our community, both locally, nationally and globally. You have within your educational tradition rich insights which our people need.

Jaime Cardinal Sin, during his homily to the Brothers on the occasion of the diamond jubilee of their coming to the Philippines said: "If St. John Baptist de la Salle were alive today in the Philippines, would he not plunge straight into the fray to educate the poor in the life-giving truths and values of Christ? Can you, his sons, the inheritors of his indomitable spirit and vision fail to plunge into the fray in his footsteps? In the children of the slums, in the children of the sacadas, in the children roaming (our streets) and the impoverished countrysides, (St.) La Salle calls to you. Fail him not, fail yourselves not in this crucial hour, and our country shall owe you a debt of eternal gratitude". I, as your Secretary, can only echo his plea and add my voice to his!