

The Heart of the Lasallian Educational Ethos¹

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My work as a Brother of the Christian Schools on the international level has allowed me many and diverse experiences and led me to the point in life where I have, more or less, begun to expect the unexpected. However, never had I imagined the surprise of being invited to stand before you today as the recipient of an honorary doctorate. I assure you that it is with a deep sense of admiration for De La Salle University and its faculty that I participate in these Commencement Exercises.

That this educational institution, so very highly esteemed in the international network of Lasallian schools and universities, honors me – and through me the Brothers – is a truly humbling experience. I wish to thank Brother Armin and Dr. Quebengco and to express my gratitude to the Board of Trustees for this recognition.

Invisible and Marginalized No Longer

I'd like to tell you a story. Not so long ago, I was touring a school much as I toured DLSU campus yesterday; and on that visit I met a troubled youngster named Calvin. He was eleven years old; and he was attending a school for the emotionally, behaviorally, and academically challenged.

The young teacher whose class I was visiting introduced all the youngsters to me (there were about a dozen), but he accidentally skipped over Calvin. I later learned that Calvin was a second generation student at this school, where his young father had also previously struggled with educational failure and emotional upset. It was the look on Calvin's face when he was passed over that I will never forget – the look of a person ignored, invisible, and once again, inadvertently marginalized. When the teacher realized what he had done and tried to remedy his mistake, Calvin then chose to ignore us. It was as though he was saying, "If you didn't see me before, I can also pretend that you are not here now."

I was reminded on that visit of John Baptist de La Salle, the seventeenth-century French priest for whom this university is named, who saw a whole social category passed over and excluded from having an education and who did something about it. It was only when he was about thirty years of age that for the first time in his life, he really saw the poor of his own city. De La Salle, whose eyes and heart were opened to their plight, used the many personal resources at his disposal to help them. He had an engaging personality, a keen and disciplined intellect, and an excellent university formation and education; and he used all of this in service of enhancing the quality of life of those less fortunate in his great nation, and not to accrue comfort or status for himself.

This young boy Calvin remains an icon in my consciousness each time I enter another gathering of people, the majority of whom I do not know. He is a reminder of how easy it is to see a crowd, a school, a grouping of youngsters or families and still actually really miss seeing any individual one of them. Even in this Convention Center, it is easy to see all as one, but not to see individual faces, not even just a few of them. Calvin is an inspiration to acknowledge each person gathered here as a truly holy presence and to recall that this quality of seeing and welcoming and knowing each precious individual is the key principle at the heart of the Lasallian educational ethos.

Deserving Respect and Capable of Making the World a Better Place

When I was a young student, the Brothers and our teachers communicated to us that we all had great worth, that we should be taken seriously, that we deserved respect, and that we could make a real difference in this world. Those were powerful lessons for me as an adolescent. I cannot imagine not having spent my life trying to communicate that same message to others.

For this is who we are as Lasallians – we strive to unleash the creative capacity of minds and to enkindle a passion in the hearts of our students. We strive to run good schools where parents can be confident that their sons and daughters will be known and loved while receiving the best education available, where they will be seen as individuals and be treated with respect while being formed in good moral values. This is where youngsters will be welcomed into a community of belonging and belief while being prepared for civic responsibility and being formed to provide the kind of leadership for which the peoples of the world dream.

Visionary Audacity

I was about fifteen years old when I heard for the first time about De La Salle-Manila, from my teacher, Brother Bertin Raymund Barry. He was a New Yorker who had worked in the Philippines from 1938 until 1945 and who had only escaped being killed in the school-chapel massacre in 1945 because he had been sent to an internment camp and then hospitalized with polio. I can still recall him saying, years after having left these islands: “The Filipinos ... what promise ... what potential ... what faith ... what enthusiasm ... what generosity.”

Over the years, I have come to see and to appreciate what he attempted to share with me. The Filipinos ... Brother Andrew Gonzalez ... Brother Rafael Donato ... Brother Benildo Feliciano ... Brother Rolando Dizon ... Brother Gus Boquer ... Brother Victor Franco ... Brother Raymundo Suplido ... Brother Armin Luistro ... Dr. Carmelita Quebengco. What vision ... what talent ... what audacity ... what a significant contribution each has made. Each is a giant in the international Lasallian Family.

Believe in Yourselves and Believe in the Goodness of Others

And so, graduates, know that you too can contribute to the greater good ... especially in these auspicious and tumultuous days of the start of the twenty-first century. My wish for you is that you go forth today from this Convention Center with eyes truly opened to the hopes and the needs of others and with hearts on fire to be the artisans of a just world, a world that includes and benefits the whole of the human family.

As recipients of the very best education available, supported and held within the loving embrace of your parents and families, and prepared by your professors and experiences at DLSU, you have the capacity, as gifted graduates of this great university, to enhance the quality of life on the national and the international scene. Go out there to embrace with both hands and a full heart the destiny that awaits you. Believe in yourselves; believe in the goodness of others. Go out into the world and really make a positive difference.

The world, your Church, and your nation need you. God bless you. Thank you. And congratulations!

Endnote

1. These remarks were delivered at De La Salle University-Manila on 10 February 2007 when the university conferred on the author the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*.

2. Brother William Mann, FSC, who received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Colgate Rochester Divinity School (1990), serves as the president of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota since 2008 and as the president of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) since 2015. He is a former Vicar General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2007).