

EDUCATION AS A JESUIT APOSTOLATE *

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Before all else, I would like to thank you all sincerely for honoring me, the University, and this occasion with your presence. My gratitude is all the more keenly felt given the realization that you have made the special effort and surrendered a valuable portion of your time to be with us here this morning.

I would like to specially thank our out-of-town guests who have traveled all this distance from Manila and from other parts of the Visayas and Mindanao, led by our Honorable Secretary of Education who, together with Rev. Bienvenido Nebres, President of the Ateneo de Manila University, braved the 3:00 o'clock flight early this morning — a flight that can only be described as ungodly!

To you all, and to the many well-wishers who cannot be here this morning, but who have sent their greetings by phone, by fax, by courier, by telegrams and letters, thank you very much.

As symbolized in the installation ceremony we have just witnessed, the Ateneo de Davao University is not merely a University recognized by the Government; it is at the same time an apostolate of the Society of Jesus. This means that the very activity of running the university and everything that entails are, at one and the same time, a "laboring with Christ", as St. Ignatius puts it in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

It is this topic that I would like to address this morning: What does it mean to run a University that at the same time is an apostolate?

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I believe it is of some importance to seriously grapple with this issue. For the Ateneo de Davao University community, it is of immediate practical importance, because it is from this starting point and towards this ideal that I, as President, will consciously strive to lead the University. For my fellow Jesuits and other Jesuits schools, it is critically important, because the issue concerns the very reason why Jesuits are in education in the first place. For the whole educational effort in the country, a country whose very emergence as a nation has been formed by the Christian Faith, it may well be profoundly relevant, because in this issue can lie fundamental answers to pressing questions concerning the nation's educational enterprise, and how it can be made responsive to our deepest needs as a nation.

What does it mean to run a University that at the same time is an apostolate?

On an immediate personal level, I take it to mean that the Ateneo de Davao University is a work of the Society of Jesus that has been entrusted to me.

If you go to the dining room of the Jesuit Residence (the building behind the chapel), you will see two walls on which hang row upon row of more than one-hundred drawings by an artist. They are the faces of Jesuits who, since the foundation of the school, have given of their lives to the work of the Ateneo de Davao. For the most part, the drawings trace the lines of youthful faces proudly sporting flourishing crops of hair. But as a matter of fact, many of these Jesuits have since gone from this world, and an even greater number have long passed their youths and parted with their hair. Some names will ring a bell, like Fr. Cesar Maravilla or Fr. James Donelan; others may not, like Fr. Gus Wieman or Fr. Martin Casey.

When then, it is said that the Ateneo de Davao is a Jesuit apostolate, these faces are a vivid reminder that this apostolate is the cumulative result of the life's work of generations of Jesuits and their lay co-workers. My installation to the Office of President is therefore a trust, a stewardship.

But what does it mean to be a steward? What is being entrusted?

A striking image of an apostolate being passed on to another for stewardship is the Resurrection scene of our Lord with Peter. Peter betrayed Jesus not once, but three times, and Jesus now, risen from the dead and about to return to the Father asks Peter three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" Each time Peter strongly protests: "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." And each time Jesus simply says in reply: "Feed my sheep".

On the eve of his departure from this earth, having entrusted Peter with his work, Jesus gives him a very simple straightforward mandate: "Feed my sheep".

What, then, is the apostolate that is being handed on? In reference to the Ateneo de Davao University, the apostolate is certainly not the buildings, or the land, or the finances that a trust department in a bank can probably administer more profitably. It is certainly not the cycle of school operations of faculty recruitment, program development, class scheduling, instruction, grading, and recording that any efficient training manager can successfully run.

"Feed my sheep." The apostolate that is being entrusted is not some abstract "work" or impersonal task. What is being entrusted is a community, composed of individual persons, brought together by a common longing, bound by common meaning, and living by a set of common values. And the task of stewardship is the task of nourishing this community, of clarifying and articulating this bond of common meaning, of strengthening this set of common values through caring for the individual persons in this community.

Put in this way, how far removed all this may seem from the pronouncements of standard textbooks on how to manage a school! And yet, when you think about it, can it be otherwise?

Let us just take, as a test case, an obvious concern of the university enterprise, the foundation of the students.

Ideally, what kind of graduate are we trying to produce in this apostolate of a Jesuit school? We strive to produce a graduate with a keen questing mind, a master of what it knows, yet humbly aware that what it knows falls far short of what remains to be known and mastered; a graduate with the affective maturity for whom the self is neither a stranger, nor the blind source of fears and biases and prejudices; a graduate with a mature sense of responsibility for one's self, for one's brethren, for one's community; a graduate whose choices and actions spring from an inner core of values that derive from the example of the person of Jesus Christ, with a holy anger before the brazenness of injustice and an effective sense of compassion before the scandal of poverty.

Such total human development, such thorough personal integration remains for the most part an ideal to be attained, for even any significant realization of this ideal is a lifetime personal achievement. Moreover the antecedents of such a development must be traced back to the home, and its full flowering can only be found in culture that, in the end, describes the Body of Christ. And no doubt, like the parable of the sower, the seeds that are sown in our school in pursuit of such development will not always fall on fertile ground.

But, despite all this, if the Ateneo de Davao, as an apostolate of the Society of Jesus, means anything, it means that to study in this school is a favored period in the lives of our students where the seeds of these ideals, of what it means to be fully and authentically human, are consciously planted and painstakingly nourished, and where, according to the times and seasons ordained by God, what is sown does bear fruit a hundredfold in the lives of our graduates.

The crucial question then emerges: How is such an educational formation to be attained?

I would like to suggest that such an educational formation is attained not primarily by lectures or programs of studies, important as these may be, for lectures and studies give understanding, and understanding something is not the same as living what is understood. Neither is it attained by pious practices alone, for pious practices can assist and perfect, but cannot supplant the

total human development and integration that is desired. Rather, this authentic, integral, and total human formation blossoms under the conditions of a heart that loves: a heart that loves the truth — not merely in mathematics or literature, but the truth in one's relationship with others, the truth in relationship with one's self; a heart that loves justice — not merely what is fair in grading, but what is fair in life, seeing how we are all children of God, yet how so many cannot partake of God's lavish gifts in this world; a heart that loves — not merely himself or his own, but his neighbor, his people, and his God.

Given such a heart that loves, the seemingly all-important goal of university, namely that of academic excellence, becomes but one of the many attainments of a successful educational effort. In fact, academic excellence becomes ranged with such other even more valuable human attainments as a gentle, open, and generous heart, a peaceful life, an indomitable, ever hopeful, ever joyful spirit.

The priority of love over intellect is a precious heritage in the traditional Christian understanding of the human person. It was a distinctive character of the early schools and universities of the Society of Jesus, where there was a conviction that moral excellence was the ultimate goal of Jesuit education, and where there prevailed the belief that the vital importance of scholarly excellence was in function of achieving moral excellence.

Unfortunately this heritage has been buried deep by the pretentious spirit of rationalism that continues to hold sway — a pernicious foreign influence of which our own universities and educators in the country are still to become critically aware.

But in our own day, seeing the bitter fruits of intelligence detached from love — think of the sophisticated weapons of human destruction, the high-tech devastation of our natural resources, the cleverness that we often enough see in lawyers, or politicians, or businessmen, or mediemen who can make wrong right, and black white — is it not time to seriously evaluate our assumptions in the task called education?

As an aside, ours has been called a "damaged culture" and seeing our chronic self-destructive tendencies, many are inclined to agree. But I would like to suggest that if our culture is damaged, then the damage is a consequence of our uncritically absorbing what is foreign and inimical to what truly makes us to be what we are as a people. For deep down in what constitutes us as a people are such qualities as a desire for harmony and peace, an affinity for song and laughter, a deep far-ranging capacity for love and caring — for our young, for our elders, for our families (that continually extend), for our town, our province, our country — for life itself. Far from having a damaged culture, we possess as a people a profoundly blest culture that, for a brief shining moment in 1986, in the peaceful revolution, showed its depth and its richness, its all-embracing range and power.

If there is a measure of truth in what I say, how do we begin to instill in our students that love that can transform their lives and the lives of those around them?

In this process, the role of the personnel of the University, particularly of the faculty, is of pivotal importance. For love is not without a face: love issues from a person who loves. Neither can love be forced, it can only be evoked, for love is born in a heart that feels itself loved. In short, if our students will learn to love, they must first feel loved; and if they will learn to expand that love to embrace the whole range of their lives, then they must see in the lives they encounter in the university, that love for truth, that love for justice, that love for neighbor and country and God that they can emulate and respond to. Hence, the key role of the faculty.

Without love, no amount of memos or instructions will ever be enough to induce a teacher to make that extra effort to help a student understand. With love, no memo or urging is needed.

From all this, the direction of my Presidency finds its bearings. There are two fundamental directions that I hope to pursue as President of the University.

The first is internal, directed to within the University.

As President I will take that simple all-embracing mandate seriously : "Feed my sheep." While this mandate embraces the whole University community, the faculty, because of its pivotal role, merits a special focus of attention. Somehow, a deep trust must develop whereby any faculty engaged in the work of the University will feel that he or she is valued; that his or her welfare is of great importance to the school, that his or her growth or her welfare is of great importance to the school, that his or her growth, both professionally and humanly, is an earnest concern of the school. It is only upon the cornerstone of such trust that together we can build the even more challenging structure of an apostolic community, that will require the continual communal articulation of common meaning and common values that make us to be the Ateneo de Davao University.

The second, parallel direction is external, and directed outside the University.

Just as on a personal level, love reaches out to what is beyond the self, so also on an institutional level, the Ateneo de Davao University must reach out beyond its internal concerns to the outside community. We must further develop and more actively explore how the talents and resources and capabilities of the University can be put in the service of Davao and Mindanao, and even of the nation should the opportunity present itself.

There are more than enough failings in our country that one can point at and complain about, and many do, and some even do nothing but complain. Unfortunately often enough these failings are beyond our direct control. There are, however, even more opportunities and resources within our control that we can exploit, through which we can create. If we are to get anywhere, we must put on the mentality whereby we assume that others in our society will do their jobs, just as we do *our* jobs; and if, in fact, they do not do *their* jobs, then in time, we will just pass them by and carry on despite them!

What then happens to academic excellence, the development of courses, the launching of new and varied and exciting programs — the accepted indicators of a University that is alive and well? That, in a sense, will be the test case whether this direction

of caring and creating a community is valid or not, feasible or not. By their fruits you shall know them!

I, on my part — and I am sure all my brother Jesuits are one with me in this sentiment — through words and action, policies and decisions, will seek to show that the leadership of the University cares for the Ateneo de Davao community, and particularly for the faculty. That caring, I hope, will be an invitation for the community and the faculty, in turn, to care for their sheep — the students that they teach, the publics that we serve. It is an oft-repeated truth that the talents, creativity, expertise, and strength of any university lie in its faculty. It is this tremendous potential that I hope love and caring will unleash.

And so, I invite the Ateneo de Davao University community : let us join hands, and together walk towards a noble mission — a mission of such great worth that God himself sent his only begotten Son to be one like us, so that by the example of his life, we cannot fail to understand what it means to be fully human.

I thank you.