



INAUGURAL ADDRESS
of
Sister Mary Thomas C. Prado, OSB
on the occasion of her investiture as
Eighteenth President of
St. Scholastica's College, Manila
St. Cecilia's Hall
August 6, 2011

M. Mary John Mananzan, OSB and my Sisters in our Benedictine Communities;
Dr. Jose Sandejas and members of the Board of Trustees;
Commission on Higher Education Chairperson Dr. Patricia Licuanan;
Members of our academic community;
Distinguished guests, alumnae, parents, benefactors, family and friends –

Good Afternoon.

The call to the Office of the Presidency of St. Scholastica's College-Manila is something "midway between a gift and an assignment." Today, I come forward to accept the responsibility of leading our 105-year old flagship school, nurtured and carried forward through these years by the intelligence, foresight, compassion and dedication of Sisters and lay mission partners who have gone before me and whose fruits of hard work we are now enjoying. Thank you for the precious gift called "trust", it put to rest a personal impasse and gave me clarity and courage.

Three years ago, I took office as a three-in-one administrator: Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dean of College and Dean of Graduate School, and brought to this institution the perspective of an outsider. Now, I begin this office with the lens to understand from within and determined as ever in embracing change that our ongoing conversations may bring.

Having formed part of the previous administration, there are no radical discontinuities in the directions I will now call on our Scholastic community to embrace. My task in this inaugural address, to borrow the words of theologian Walter Brueggemann, is not so much to present "a grand scheme or a coherent system, but the voicing of a lot of little

pieces out of which [we] can put [our] life together in fresh configurations.”¹ These directions therefore will be something old, something new, something borrowed and something truly Scholastican blue.

In the changing educational landscape here in the country and abroad, we were “forced” as it were, to do our soul searching and question our place and space in Philippine education. Down through time, with pressures within and around us, we thought we could be otherwise, but time and again, from one concern to the next, we have found that our mission – our reason for being, remains the same.

I call on our academic community to commit anew to important elements of our life in this institution. First, to **education as mission and vocation**. Around this time 105 years ago, our first five German Sisters were busy preparing for their “Philippine Mission”. Nine days later, on August 15, 1906, they set sail to the other half of the equator to answer the call of evangelization, specifically, “for the instruction of children”. It was the mission of providing Catholic, Benedictine education that made our pioneers survive the difficulties of the foundation of the first school at Moriones St., Tondo, the demands of expansion in San Marcelino and Singalong, the challenges of rebuilding after the destruction caused by the Second World War and the labour of giving the school a name of prestige and respectability. Our foremothers showed us the example of service, the spirit of sacrifice and singleness of purpose. They were teachers and administrators who also moonlighted as the school’s domestic workers, and perhaps also the small-time carpenters, plumbers and electricians of the fledgling school. Today, let us add to the pages of our history. Let it be said of us that the reason we are here is because we believe in the transformative power of education and because we feel called to the vocation to teach. Let our hearts burn again with the passion to serve, with the passion of being “teachers on a mission” after the heart and mind of the one great teacher, Jesus Christ.

Second, we re-articulate our **preferential option for the education of women and girls**. This means that St. Scholastica’s College will remain a women’s college producing the finest women leaders in the country. With this thrust, we not only give preferential attention to women but continue to take full cognizance of the role of women in our society, their empowerment, and the importance of their contribution to change and transformation. Alongside with this, we re-affirm that Women’s Studies is a fundamental subject in our Liberal Arts core; and that all faculty and personnel will undergo required training or re-training in women’s orientation and gender-sensitivity.

¹ Brueggemann, W. (1993). *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Third, we take up afresh our commitment to action in behalf of **social justice and social transformation** as a constitutive dimension of the living out of our faith. That our first school began among the poor in Tondo, in a windowless wagon-shed with 15 benches borrowed from the Daughters of Charity of Sta. Rosa College, is not just stray historical data. Although eventually morphing into an exclusive private school for girls, since its beginning our Sisters embraced marginality and worked for the inclusion of the disenfranchised and those who lived on the edges of our society. When the school opened for the first time on December 3, 1906, the “free school” for the poor existed side by side with the paying school. Throughout its history, St. Scholastica’s College never abandoned the education of the poor. Our Night Secondary School, giving free secondary education to poor students, has existed alongside our paying students in this campus for 38 years now. I call on our Scholastican community to fully support our NSS and accord it a place of dignity and respect here in SSC.

Likewise, we will go beyond our institution’s interests and strengthen our Adopt-a-School program in Mindanao, particularly with the 12 Manobo schools and the agricultural school in Marihatag and the Lumad school in Han-ayan, Surigao del Sur, and establish new ones in Luzon. This is our concrete contribution to nation building, especially to our Philippine education system facing the challenge for higher standards of excellence, for equal access, for better facilities, and for clearer educational goals.

Within the various political eras and social issues that emerged in our country, and experiences of repression and destabilization notwithstanding, socio-political involvement and the parliament of the streets have become life-changing, maturing, and transforming experiences for generations of Scholasticans. More than ever before, we vow to be “social voices that matter”, to be truth-seekers, explorers of proactive solutions to transform situations, and reflective agents of change. Our degree programs will consciously carry our advocacies for women and children, for the alleviation of poverty, for environmental stewardship. These we shall do always in the tradition of Jesus who sought to bring those in the margins to the center.

In the Benedictine tradition of seeking and pursuing peace, we will complete the consolidation of our Peace Education program and peace initiatives. Having this investiture on August 6 is a deliberate choice, not only to plead the heavens for the grace of the Transfiguration, but also because this day marks the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, an event that ushered into the whole world the timeless quest for peace.

All these elements comprise the SOUL of Scholastican education that we shall always carry in our hearts as we take the necessary steps into our future.

It is said that the force of an institution “lies not only in its glorious history but in its ability to imagine and create its future” from the creative events of the present. We belong to the Catholic, Benedictine intellectual tradition that is expansive and resilient, “unafraid of ambiguity or the unknown, cognizant of vulnerability and failure, vigorous in self-criticism, and yet generous in engaging ideas both old and new...”² Ours is a tradition that begins with “listening with the ear of our hearts”, a tradition that is so grounded and yet flexible enough to adapt to any changing circumstance.

All of us will have to go the way forward, take responsibility and be accountable for our imagined future. We shall make our institution’s ecosystem – our governance, financial resources, physical infrastructure and quality assurance -- function optimally for the common good and in support of our goals. In concrete, we will navigate the path towards the realization of the **Ten-year Directions of SSC, the Ten-year Sustainable Campus Development Plan, and the Five-year Campus Automation Plan.**

We commit to providing our students improved facilities supportive of the pursuit of academic excellence. Our Ten-year Sustainable Campus Development Plan will meet our needs as well as those who will come after us. We will develop our physical infrastructure in a manner that respects our historical heritage and our environment as well as translate our mission and vision into physical form.

We will create a school culture marked by Benedictine values that we have named as the Ten Hallmarks of Benedictine Education. We will direct our teaching and learning towards the core competencies and skills our three units have articulated. We will respond to this global community that is changing so fast through our liberally educated graduates with a broad knowledge base, equipped with competencies and skills and a high level of social responsibility.

All these tasks are our way of participating in God’s work in the world.

I cannot end this address without acknowledging the divine source of all good gifts – God in whom I move and have my being and without whom every endeavour becomes whimsical or else superficial. Likewise, to two people who have passed on to another life, my parents, who taught me several things that I now stand for and to all those who formed my heart and mind as well as infused me with courage and inspiration.

Finally, the appeal. It is not easy to take the hand of a 105-year old and to show her the way to a sustainable future. To our mission partners and all our stakeholders, please

² Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities (2007). *Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition*.

join me in carrying our mission through to the end. We have gone a long way indeed, but, in another sense, as in the lines of a song – “we’ve only just begun.”

Thank you.

That in all things, God may be glorified!