

LET US START THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

La Salle Green Hills Retreat House

National Heroes Day

30 November 2007

To all Filipinos of goodwill,

Profoundly disturbed by recent events, we the De La Salle Brothers of the Philippines, have decided as a body to exercise our vocation as teachers and guides by raising our voices in protest at the moral degeneration that has infiltrated almost every aspect of public life since we called for a restoration of faith in democracy in 2005.

In July of that year, we and our colleagues issued a public statement in response to the crisis brought on by the Garcillano tapes and the ensuing controversies surrounding President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. At that time, we spoke out as educators, charged with the moral guidance of the young and concerned with upholding the values of honesty, integrity and truthfulness in public life and civil society. In that statement, we affirmed the principle that moral ascendancy is a critical ingredient to effective governance, and warned that a leadership without moral authority cannot realistically command the respect of a nation. Today, two years later, we are alarmed and ashamed that the situation has increasingly worsened. The signs of moral disintegration abound:

- the escalating number of acts of violence against journalists, leftists and members of the legal opposition, which according to a report of the UN Human Rights Council representative have been perpetrated by some elements in the military;
- unresolved anomalies in government, including the aborted ZTE-NBN deal and the fertilizer scam, which involve billions of pesos in public funds;
- the large amounts of cash distributed in brown bags to some lawmakers at Malacañang just as impeachment moves were being initiated and firmed up in Congress and the facile efforts to hide the truth about their origins and purpose;
- concerted efforts among some lawmakers and government officials to block attempts at establishing truth and securing accountability;
- the corruption of the electoral system as manifested in various anomalies related to the last national election.

The net effect of these, together with past anomalies, has been to further undermine confidence in practically every institution of government. Widespread despair with these existing institutions can only spawn violence and increasing military adventurism. We need only think of the fiasco at the Manila Peninsula on 29 November 2007 to see that this is so.

What is even more lamentable is the degree to which many Filipinos have become desensitized to the stench of corruption because of the unending stream of government-related scams, cover-ups and scandals. The unwillingness of the public to engage in peaceful public exercises of moral outrage and to support calls for government accountability bespeak a weary cynicism and loss of hope in all possibility of meaningful change that is especially alarming for us as educators.

This retreat from civic responsibility bodes ill for the future. This is perhaps our generation's greatest crime: to rob our people, especially our youth, of the conviction that noble ideals are worth every sacrifice and that moral principles must prevail in public life.

For these reasons, even if it amounts to no more than a voice crying out in the wilderness, we, the De La Salle Brothers of the Philippines, feel the need to proclaim once again the same values we espoused in 2005: truth, justice, honesty and integrity. Without these, no government can be trusted, and where there is no trust, governance degenerates into bribery and intimidation. We join in the call of courageous religious leaders and of proven men and women of conscience who seek a moral revolution. But if such a call is to become more than mere lip-service, we must translate it into effective action on behalf of the values we espouse, keeping in mind the legal framework of the Constitution. We call on men and women of goodwill to act now to make real the change they want to see.

To all parents, teachers, pastors, religious and all those charged with the moral formation of youth: God has given us the extraordinary privilege of mentoring the young and laying the foundations of our country's future. Let us not betray God's trust. Let us teach the young that what is happening today is wrong. Let us teach them that a life without moral virtue or principle is no life at all, but a subhuman existence unworthy of their dignity as children of God. Let us teach them that we are all answerable to God for what we have made, not just of our lives, but also of our nation. Let us teach them, as one man showed us years ago, that the Filipino is worth dying for.

To all Filipino workers here and abroad, farmers and fisherfolk, men and women in business, entrepreneurs and professionals: your efforts and earnings sustain the economic and political life of our country. In solidarity with one another, demand more from this government. Come together to hold this country's leadership accountable for their stewardship of the taxes you pay. Demand that every centavo be properly allocated and accounted for. Demand transparency and fairness in all business transactions. Consider the long-term goals and voice your displeasure at lost opportunities and the abuses that squander our nation's wealth to the detriment of all, especially the poor.

To all artists, poets, writers and media practitioners: you are the vanguards of culture. You bear the great responsibility of ennobling the soul and creating a culture supportive of truth, justice and respect for human dignity. Focus on this task. Create visions and words that inspire and move our people to live up to what is best in them.

To all our men and women in uniform: our hearts go out to you for the ready sacrifices you have made again and again in the service of our nation. We acknowledge with gratitude the selflessness many of you have shown again and again. Remember that you are called to be defenders of the Constitution and protectors of human rights. Please do not fail in this charge. Let it be clear, however, that we do not condone military adventurism for it is inconsistent with the basic democratic values we hold dear.

To all civil servants, legislators and government workers: we believe that you also dream of a better nation for our children. We beg you to resist the culture of corruption. Help us build a future full of hope for our children.

To all our alumni and alumnae: we encourage you to take cognizance of the education you have received from La Salle all these years. As dark clouds hover in the horizon, we challenge you to and make a difference. Take heart from your fellow alumnus, Jose W. Diokno, and his vision of “a free nation, where men and women and children from all regions and with all kinds of talents may find truth and play and sing and laugh and dance and love without fear...”

We end this statement by sharing with you, our fellow Filipinos, this prayer of hope as we, the De La Salle Brothers look to 2011, the 100th year of the Lasallian ministry of education in the Philippines:

*Lord, let me be the change I want to see
To do with strength and wisdom
All that needs to be done
And become the hope that I can be.
Set me free from my fears and hesitations.
Grant me courage and humility.
Fill me with spirit to face the challenge
And start the change I want to see.
Today, I start the change I want to see.
Even if I'm not the light, I can be the spark.
In faith, service and communion
Let us start the change we want to see,
The change that begins in me.*

