

Appendix B

*Magkaisa, Pamilyang San Beda**

At the outset, allow me to congratulate San Beda College for winning the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball crown after 28 years. From what I hear, a San Beda basketball dynasty is in the making. That should not come as a surprise, because Bedans are said to have been dominating all kinds of courts, including our courts of law. The incessant clanging and ringing of *campanas* and *campanillas* of the attorneys present today attest to this paramount, even if facetiously said, fact.

As I looked into your faces, and heard your greetings, I felt very much welcome. Thus, I thank the San Beda Law Alumni Association for inviting me to this festive gathering and for making me its honorary member. Now, I am not only a Tamaraw, I am also a Red Lion!

Distinguished Bedans

Get-togethers like this are always joyous occasions to reminisce; review and update each other; exchange notes; and to celebrate together the triumphs and tears

encountered along the way to the top.

Through the years, I have been truly blessed to have the opportunity to meet and befriend many Bedan lawyers, all brilliant and distinguished.

In the National Union of Students of the Philippines in the late fifties and when I was a young lawyer in the early sixties, I met talented, up-and-coming men like Raul Roco, Rene Saguisag, Pablo Trillana, Rudy Robles, Vic de la Serna and Boy Brillantes. During my first few years in the Supreme Court, I was equally privileged to discuss and deliberate important issues and cases with Justices Florenz D. Regalado, Justo P. Torres Jr. and Antonio M. Martinez, all red-blooded Bedans.

Justice Florenz, the all-time record holder of the highest passing average in the bar examinations, is the epitome not only of excellence, but also of the old-time value of *delicadeza*. He is the most reclusive magistrate I have ever met. At least, he is the only person I know who does not attend his own birthday parties.

Although then senior in age, Justice Tito Torres was nonetheless very young in mind and spirit. He was an irrepressible visionary and ebullient decision-maker who did not hesitate to try new solutions to resolve recurring problems. God-loving, congenial, and connoisseur of fine language, the stint of Justice Tony Martinez may

have been too brief, but he has definitely left his unmistakable imprint in my memory of great jurists.

Now I refer with fondness and pride to my esteemed colleague, Justice Romeo J. Callejo Sr. Justice Romy, an acknowledged authority in criminal law and procedure, is due to retire in April next year. At least temporarily, San Beda will be orphaned in the High Court. Don't you think it is high time another Red Lion is named to the Court?

A Bedan Chief?

But if San Beda does not as yet have a Chief Justice, blame it on Rene Saguisag. In the early days of President Cory Aquino, he held a fully signed appointment to the Supreme Court, but he chose to ignore it and run for the Senate instead. Had he accepted it, I am sure he would have become Chief Justice "in the long of time." But had he done so, there would have been no Chief Justices Yap, Fernan, Narvasa, Davide and Panganiban, because today we would still have had Chief Justice Saguisag! He would have been the longest serving Chief Justice, longer than Chief Justice Cayetano Arellano's 20 years. Rene may not be Chief Justice, but my *compadre* is an irrepressible critic of those who have attained the position. He is wont to say, "Whenever one enters the judiciary, I lose a friend." In my case, upon my appointment as justice in 1995, I not only lost a friend, but also gained an occasional

critic.

Another distinguished San Beda lawyer who should have been Chief Justice is Ave Cruz, bar topnotcher and ACCRA founder, who is also the president of the ASEAN Law Association (ALA) - Philippine Chapter. Indeed, when attending ALA meetings abroad, he is always addressed as “Honorable Avelino V. Cruz.” So, ladies and gentlemen, we should also learn to address him properly as “Your Honor.”

To complete the record, San Beda is alma mater to outstanding young lawyers clerking in our highest court -- like Millicent Reyes and Ma. Lourdes San Pablo (who both work in my chamber), Rhodalyn Montemayor-Abas (who is with Justice Angelina Sandoval-Gutierrez’s chamber), and Attys. Anna Christina Arias-Sumilong, Normalyn Magbag and Marvin Galacgac (all of Justice Callejo’s chamber). San Beda is also home to aging, but not aged, attorneys like Spanky Perez, Mel Mathay and Dante Barbosa.

Aiming for Excellence

Levity aside, I believe that the professional and public service milestones reached by every Bedan alumnus and alumna present here tonight reveal the seeds of the passion for excellence and the highest Christian virtues planted and nurtured by

the deans, dedicated mentors, and rectors of San Beda's law school. Indeed, good seeds produce a harvest of good fruits.

According to the first dean of the San Beda College of Law, the esteemed Feliciano Jover Ledesma whom I had the pleasure of meeting and admiring, its mission from the very beginning was "to produce good Christian and highly principled lawyers, mentally and spiritually equipped to take their places among the real apostles of justice." Reflecting on these wise words of Dean Ledesma, I am reminded of three core values that have become the cornerstones of both my professional and personal life. I call these values the three *E*s of a life worth living: excellence, ethics and eternity.

After graduation, when we faced the real world and dealt with real-life situations, we began to understand that excellence was a value that demanded the best performance from all of us all the time. Excellence connotes not merely competence, but also dedication to duty and hard work put together.

In this rapidly advancing age of information and bio-technology, one cannot stop learning. We have to study and specialize constantly. We must develop a passion for excellence and a habit of moving on -- of being always ahead in learning, training and experience.

Ethics: Source of True Success

Excellent service, however, is not enough. We must also strive to possess uncompromising personal integrity. As I have said so often in the past, integrity refers not only to honesty, but also to truth. A person of integrity acts in accordance with what is true and honest regardless of personal consequences. To act with integrity is to act with moral courage.

Indeed, the greatest need of our society today are persons “who will not be bought or sold; who in their inmost souls are true and honest; who do not fear to call sin by its right name; whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; who will stand for the right though the heavens may fall.”^[1]

Character is not a mantle to be put on and taken off at will, but is the very fabric of our being. Ultimately, character is shaped and reshaped not by the clothes we wear, but by the choices we make and the virtues we practice.

Some 2,700 years ago, Hezekiah, a youthful leader, stepped onto the stage of life. His nation was under attack from within and without. Time-honored values had been neglected and forgotten. Invading nations of superior strength were steadily

advancing, victorious in every encounter. The future looked hopeless. In the midst of the chaos and confusion came a simple and profound message. It was carried by Micah, a little-known prophet preacher. He crafted a prescription for living in just eight action-packed words: “Act justly,” “Love mercy,” and “Walk humbly with God.”^[2]

To act justly is a mandate to investigate carefully, to analyze rigorously, to conclude fairly; to take well-reasoned and unbiased action. **To love mercy** is a calling to connect with broken humanity; to forgive and restore; to be God’s agents of love and compassion. **To walk humbly with God** is an invitation to a lifelong journey of dedication, nurturance, and renewal; and an intimate voyage -- of the creature with the Creator, the fallible with the Infallible, and the sinner with the Savior.

Firmly Rooted

The third e-value is faith in eternity as our final destiny.

Although I was born a Catholic, nobody really taught me religion. Having attended non-religious schools, I did not have the opportunity to learn catechism. Thus, my real introduction to God came rather late in life.

My wife, Leni, and I underwent a spiritual rebirth from 1986 to 1995 after we joined the Bukas Loob sa Diyos, a charismatic community of renewed Catholics. During those nine years, we embarked on a journey of faith through a marriage encounter, a “Life in the Spirit” seminar, retreats, and other programs to relearn and re-experience our faith. In the process, we had a most fulfilling encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ.

On my part, I have learned to trust Him and to depend on Him for all my needs, aspirations and wants. Often I pray. Even if I do not get what I want, still, I continue to repose my full faith and confidence in Him. I know that God is infinitely more intelligent and powerful than I or anyone else.

Indeed, He always knows my needs better than I do. And I am confident that He will provide all things good for me and my family, in His own time and in His own way. Let me assure you that in all my life, struggles, frustrations and victories, God has never failed in His promise that He would “[make] all things work for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose.”^[3]

Good Roots, Good Fruits

To live a life mindful of these three *Es* is not easy. Attaining the discipline and

the passion does not readily come by. It must be prudently begun and continuously nurtured. In other words, for the fruit to be of good quality, the plant must be rooted well. Good roots yield good fruits.

From the first year of law school to the bar review, Bedans are taught and trained in this fine institution, pursuant to the highest standards of academic and character formation. No wonder that many of our nation's past and present legal giants hail from San Beda. Only good fruits can come from the "good roots."

Unity a Key Factor

True progress, however, will remain only an ideal, a consummation devoutly to be wished, unless there is a determined and concerted effort to achieve it. Hence, everyone must aspire and conspire for unity in thought and action.

As Chief Justice, I can only succeed as much as would the men and women serving the judiciary. It is their collective and active participation, generous cooperation, and love for their work that enable the Court to meet its targets and achieve its goals. So must Bedans conspire to make things happen for ourselves and our beloved alma mater! While we may not know for certain what the future holds, I am sure that we all want it to be active, creative, innovative and positive.

Closing

In closing, allow me, on behalf of the Supreme Court, to acknowledge and thank San Beda for its active partnership with us in pushing for continuing reforms in the judiciary. I am particularly happy to note that the San Beda College of Law shares our vision for the improvement of legal and ethical standards, which it emphasizes just as strongly as academic excellence.

My remarks tonight have focused on the core of what we must ALSO do -- the core of who we are and what we can become as individuals living in a time of unprecedented opportunities and unexpected challenges. We are called to ensure that our agenda consistently extends beyond professional competence. We are called upon to be principled, responsible citizens who respect moral values, personal honor, and the equal rights of others; and dissuaded from having self-centered concerns for upward mobility, narrow careerism, and destructive individualism.

Finally, let me end with these excerpts from the various letters of St. Paul:

“Stand by what you have learned and what has been entrusted to you, remembering from whom you learned it. (2 Tim 3 :14)

“Run the great race of faith; take hold of eternal life. (1 Tim 6 :12)

“Let us never tire of doing good, for if we slacken not our efforts we shall in due time reap our harvest.” (Gal 6 :9)

Ladies and gentlemen, *Ut in Omnibus Glorificetur Deus* -- That in All Things, God May Be Glorified!

Maraming salamat po.

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Speech I delivered during the San Beda Alumni Association Homecoming and Fellowship Night held on November 15, 2006, at the Kalayaan Hall, Club Filipino, Greenhills, San Juan, Metro Manila.

[1]

<http://www.ellenwhite.org/sl/edc/htm> (Education, Ch. 7, Lives of Great Men), last visited on November 13, 2006.

[2]

Micah 6:8

[3]

Romans 8:28.