

SILLIMAN'S EDUCATIONAL MANDATE

*Towards New Directions*¹

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As one moves through the pathwalks of this venerable institution, one cannot help but look at the ancient and stately acacia trees, their imposing branches at once creating and enfolding the ambiance of history and tradition that permeates this campus. These towering acacia trees are products of nurturing by a people with a deep sense of history and tradition. Recorded as the second university founded in the nation after the University of Santo Tomas in Metro Manila, Silliman University is indeed replete with a great and unique history. For was it not on August 28, 1901 that this university was formed as an elementary school for young boys by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America? Little did the philanthropist by the name of Dr. Horace Brinsmade Silliman know that his donation of \$10,000.00 was merely the seed of an acorn from which a giant and complex oak of a university will arise.

Today this university stands in an even more unique position in history. Not only is it celebrating its centennial in the year 2001, but is also going to cross a millennium. A hundred years will end for Silliman University and also one thousand years for the history of the world. It is therefore with a deep sense of history and foresight that I approach the highest position of this institution.

I come into this presidency with the task of providing leadership to an institution whose undying grand tradition has sustained it over the years, but whose future is uncertain as it grapples with two contending forces: on the one hand, the need to preserve that which has been gained for a long period of time such as the tradition of academic excellence and Christian values; on the other, the need to explore new strategies and prospects to sustain the drive for excellence under conditions of scarcity. There is an aspiration for the new, yet a deep reluctance to part with the past. To preserve, one must control; to explore, one must be daring to change.

There is an old Philippine adage that reminds us to look back at our past to enable us to reach our future. As its mandate, Silliman University has set itself the task of educating men and women after the ideal of the great Master-Teacher Himself, Jesus Christ, from

¹ Speech delivered by Dr. Mervyn J. Misajon on his installation as 10th President of Silliman University, 27 August 1994, Luce Auditorium, Dumaguete City.

whose exemplary life the motto *Via, Veritas, Vita*, meaning the Way, the Truth, and the Life is derived. With quality Christian education as its mission for the past 93 years, Silliman has pursued the goal of raising professionals with competitive skills in all areas of human life - be it in the Social Sciences, Physical Sciences or the Arts - yet with the character, passion, wisdom and justice of Christ. Truly indeed, if Silliman is going to progress into the new millennium, there is first a need to review the university's performance and accomplishments. This is vital in determining whether indeed the university continues to operate within its conceptual mandate as well as fulfill that mandate. If not, it is in great danger of becoming either irrelevant or altogether moribund.

Today, I understand and remember the noble beginning of this university. Also today, I see that Silliman needs to adapt to the special character of the times. New things come with tides, and new wineskin is needed to hold the new wine. From the book of Matthew, Chapter 9, verse 17 of the *Holy Bible*, we read about the allegory of the wineskin. I quote: "Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins, if they do the skins will burst. New wine will run out and the wineskin will be ruined." No, they pour new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved. The wisdom gained from this allegory underlies the new directions to which I hope to take Silliman as its new president.

What then is the symbolic significance of this allegory in the context of Silliman University? Which is the wineskin and which is the wine? As I view it, the new ideas and new directions being poured in by the new administration are the fresh wine. Our wineskin is the conglomerate of structures woven through traditions. These are the system and sub-systems that have developed their own directions through the years. To be a new wineskin, existing structures must be opened up - complementary, consolidated and directionally cogent. Existing structures that cannot handle newness may cause a crack and spill out the benefits of the new directions. But if men and structures are willingly and productively used, then these new ideas can become the seeds from which a greater Silliman can emerge.

These new directions will focus on the development and strengthening of three major areas: instruction, research and extension. Instruction will undergo a review and faculty and staff development will be prioritized. Linkaging among existing research projects and encouraging university-wide research climate in specific areas in the natural and Social Sciences and Culture will be nurtured. Technology transfer through an organized extension program shall be accomplished with overseas educational assistance particularly in the areas of primary health care and local government systems. All these new directions and thrusts are spelled out in the document you have with you today, *SUMMA 2001*. Generally, these thrusts have been designed to deal with the major crisis of the times --- scarcity. An increase in university population brings about great competition for existing resources like remuneration, benefits, facilities. Scarcity, in fact, brings about a legal kind of competition that ends often in annihilation.

The new thrusts that are outlined in the document in your hands should enable us to deal with scarcity as a stimulus for drawing innovative alternatives to aging solutions without compromising our original educational mandate. Through all this, we must remember that Silliman University is especially tasked to produce men and women with character to face the greatest scarcity of them all, the hardening of the human heart.

If advanced technology is the answer to the problems of human existence, why is there a pronounced breakdown in the family system in developed nations? If knowledge were enough, how come there is no answer to the eradication of humanity in Africa? If academic excellence is sufficient, how is it so that fraternity rambles in respected institutions have become the norm? No, academic excellence is not enough. The answer points to the heart of the man who holds the knowledge, processes the technology, and dispenses with resources. The human heart therefore must be properly sensitized to the needs of others. And only God can properly sensitize the heart of man.

Towards this end, therefore, a more zealous learning of the Word of God shall be encouraged throughout the university. Scriptures say that the Word of God is a two-edged sword that pierces the hardest hearts. Through this, I believe our university will have a preeminence over other universities. For here, only in Silliman, we hold both the mind and heart of man.

In closing, I say to my teammates in the administration, close ranks with me for a house divided against itself cannot stand. To the members of the faculty I say excel in the three areas of university endeavor. To the staff I say, support the functions of the system for you are its vital parts. And to the students I say understand that each one of you possesses not only the skills to learn, but the heart to understand the very purpose of learning in a Christian university. To the honorable members of the Board of Trustees I say, I come to lead as you have come to guide me. To the wonderful alumni, many of whom I have met over the past days, I say, never ever extinguish the fire of selfless support for dear old Silliman. To all I say, we are a part of one body, neither one is independent of another. Our future only becomes clear and achievable if we all understand the special destiny of our beloved university.

The educational mandate of Silliman is clear and unchanging. As its newly installed and 10th president, I am serious about accomplishing its mission. With God's grace and your support, this institution by the sea that has been home to many of you and has a treasure chest of fond childhood and young adulthood memories shall continue to be onward upon the rock and achieve the purpose that was there to accomplish. To God be the glory.