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LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY'S LOCUS AND *KAIROS*[*]

2006 Inaugural Address

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On this occasion of transition, it is perhaps with some irony, though fitting nevertheless, to reflect briefly, not on the comings and goings of individuals at Loyola School of Theology (LST), but on what gives LST a distinct character—on the meaning of its place and time, its locus and *kairos*.

LST is located in the Philippines, and for those preparing for local ministry, [it] is therefore one possibility for theological studies. For those from abroad, it offers instruction in English and relative accessibility to foreign students. But our reflection on its locus goes beyond such practical, though undeniably important, considerations, and is not concerned with comparisons to theological schools here or elsewhere. It inquires instead about the significance of a school of theology in the Philippines and about how such a location might shape theological formation.

To begin with, the Philippines has a dominant Catholic majority, and has described itself, especially after the 1949 Chinese Revolution and during the Cold War era, as the only Christian, even Catholic, country in Asia. Thus, the Philippines is often seen as an anomaly in Asia, where Christians are the minority.

[*]Loyola School of Theology: June 27, 2006.

But this characterization of the Philippines only serves to highlight its long-standing and multi-faceted links to Asia. We simply need to do an archaeology of Philippine languages for signs of this: *budhi* (conscience) is from Sanskrit, *ate* (elder sister) from Chinese, *duha* (two) from Javanese, and *mangan* (eat) in Kapampangan from Malay. Furthermore, with the wave of colonization in the 16th century, European missionaries considered our islands a stepping stone to China. Soon after, the Philippines became a center of missionary activity to places like Japan, where San Lorenzo Ruiz was martyred, and the Marianas (present-day Guam), where Blessed Pedro Calungsod [canonized as a saint in 2012] assisted Jesuit Diego de San Vittores.

This link with Asia and even the Pacific has continued today. It was thus not altogether surprising that the preparatory meeting for the establishment of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) took place in Manila, with Fr. Catalino G. Arevalo, S.J., former LST president, among its moving spirits. Many religious congregations have chosen the Philippines as the place for religious formation in this region, from novitiates and houses of studies to renewal programs and seminars. We can even name as new missionaries the many Filipino workers who have brought their faith to all corners of the globe with our liturgical music from Fr. "Honti" (Eduardo Hontiveros, S.J., d. 2008) and Fr. Manoling (Manuel V. Francisco, S.J.), both of LST, among others.

But aside from its claim as the only Catholic country in Asia despite East Timor's 1999 independence, the Philippines has also been given the unflattering tag-name of being "the basket case of Asia." We are known for political instability, economic underdevelopment, and moral corruption—the same realities repeatedly pointed out by the pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and easily verified in today's newspaper headlines.

Given its locus in what is simultaneously identified as the only Catholic country in and the basket case of Asia, LST cannot but be concerned with the relation between Christian Faith and social context: more specifically, with the meaning of this concrete Faith for the authentic worship of God and full development of peoples and persons. Not a rehash of what is construed as the Weberian thesis about

the incompatibility of Catholicism with development,[1] this general theological concern, true enough, is germane to other contexts. But it takes a distinct vernacular nuance, posed as it is against the background of Christianity's influence in, and contribution to, practically all facets of Philippine life and society. Formation at LST, then, needs to be a properly theological response to local echoes of Israel's cry, "How long, O Lord?"

Now to LST's sense of time and what its *kairos* signifies regarding the shape of theological formation at LST. With its roots in San Jose Seminary along then Highway 54 and now EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue), LST was intended to provide theological training for the priesthood in the Philippines, especially for Jesuits who were sent abroad until then. LST's establishment happened during the historic aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Granted that we must neither place Vatican II outside the greater tradition of the Church nor paint an idealized portrait with nostalgia, this synchronicity with the Council clearly marks a defining moment for LST's approach to theological formation.

Guided by the masterful four-volume *History of Vatican II* with Guiseppe Alberigo as general editor and LST faculty Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle as contributor,[2] let us then examine the Council not so much through its familiar texts or its strengths and weaknesses but in terms of what Alberigo refers to as "the journey by which the assembly gained its own identity" (II, 583).

This experience of journey, since memorialized in the Council's reference to the pilgrim Church, provides the root metaphor for the Council itself. With Pope John XXIII's general summons to *aggiornamento* and with trust in the Spirit as its only initial provisions, the Council, said Cardinal Gracias of India, "learned to walk on our own feet" (II, 567).

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[1]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribners, 1958).

[2]Guiseppi Alberigo & Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books / Leuven: Peeters, 1995).

This pilgrimage included many. Alberigo counts "between 1500 and 2100 bishops in addition to scores and scores of their theologians" (III, 495), [as well as] groups of Christian observers and other experts. Beyond these, "the entire community of believers was 'called to a council'" (II, 580) and "to come together in union and to embrace an 'aggiornamento'" (I, 504). Thus the Council became "an epicenter of contemporary life, starting with Rome, which had been 'invaded' by thousands of participants from every part of the world" (II, 572).

This "entirely new state of 'catholicity'" (III, 499) was purchased with great difficulty. The search for appropriate and effective structures and processes was protracted. Supported by papal leadership, especially during the transition from John XXIII to Paul VI, painstaking discussions in new groupings and at informal occasions prevented conflicting views from disrupting the assembly.

This manner of facing new and complex theological issues was based on a way of proceeding that became characteristic of the Council, one that embraced both a return to the sources of Christian Faith and a critical engagement with the contemporary world. To quote Alberigo once more, "the liturgical renewal, ecumenism, the return to sources, the return to the Bible—movements that for decades have led a sad life, often suspected or merely tolerated—unexpectedly became the lode-stars of the aggiornamento" (II, 570).

In this way, the Council discovered and deepened its focus "in a stronger meaning of the term 'pastoral': the subordination of every other aspect of the church's life to the image of Christ as 'Good Shepherd'" (I, 503), the One who goes in search of the lost and who lays down his life.

Given this *kairos* during the season of Vatican II, LST cannot but be shaped by the Council's inclusive way of proceeding. Led by the Spirit on the path to *aggiornamento*, the Council called for a return to the sources of our Faith as well as a critical encounter with the contemporary world, and this call has since laid the fundamental approach to theological formation at LST.

Its locus and *kairos* being what they are, LST is called to address the theological concern regarding the meaning of Christian Faith for authentic worship and human development from and in a context where Christianity is influential, where the practice of religion is not threatened. But for its formation to bear some mark of truthfulness, catholicity, and holiness, it must be in conversation with theological insight from contexts where Christianity is a minority faith, primarily concentrated among the poor and living with other religious traditions as neighbors, where Christianity is marginalized by militant secularism or threatened by fundamentalisms within and outside, and where Christianity partners with all those of good will.

Moreover, because the call of Vatican II continues to be timely for LST during what Hispanic writers [call] *tiempos mixtos*, when "the premodern, the modern, and the post-modern exist together in the same place" (cf. Robert Schreiter, The New Catholicity, p. 55), theological formation at LST demands an inclusive way of proceeding based, more than ever and in equal measure, on profound faithfulness to our Christian heritage as well as radical engagement with our social situation.

LST's ministry involves nothing less than keeping the Faith alive in ourselves and for succeeding generations by discovering fresh paths toward the Kingdom. And because this task is made neither easy by the complexities of our context nor straightforward by the subtlety of God's ways, LST counts on its partners and resources.

Through more than four decades in this ministry, LST has grown as a school of theology with various ecclesiastical and civil degree programs for those preparing for ministries—ordained, religious, and lay—within the Church. With our library and classroom facilities as well as the gracious support of benefactors, the dedicated men and women of our faculty and staff are our most important resource for theological formation and research. But in no small measure, all this is due to all of you, our partners among local church leaders, within religious congregations, and in the laity who provide us not only with students from 17 different countries eager to learn because of their commitment to serve, but also with their rich experience in ministry so that our theological programs are truly rooted in the life of the Church.

More than resource or partner from the very beginning, the Society of Jesus has empowered LST for ministry and for collaboration with other Jesuit institutions, especially the Ateneo de Manila University and East Asian Pastoral Institute. More recently, the Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania [JCEAO; now Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific, JCAP], made up of the Jesuit major superiors in our region, resolved to support LST in making its programs more attuned to Asian realities.

We thank you then not only for your presence today but for your partnership with LST. All of us would do well to renew our shared commitment to the ministry of theological formation, to embrace its present challenges with hope, and to work for even greater service as we journey toward our 50th year.

Kasama ninyong lahat at sa grasya ng Diyos, hindi kailanman magiging wala sa lugar at sala sa panahon ang Loyola School of Theology [With all of you and in God's grace, Loyola School of Theology will never be out of place and time]. We can dare say that the place and the time of LST are more than coincidence; they are indeed providence.

Maraming salamat po. [Thank you very much].