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CHALLENGES OF OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIVES*

2007 Academic Convocation Address

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My dear friends, it has been customary for the President to give a brief SOLA (State of LST Address) at this time. This I will do but through a different literary genre. I will not talk about projects undertaken or our student profile according to program, gender, and affiliation. Reports can be read and numbers tallied. I will instead describe the state of the school in terms of how to reach the common dreams articulated in the six directives from our ongoing strategic planning process. After refining them through consultations with all stakeholders and before choosing strategic programs to implement them, perhaps an intermediary step involving some guiding principles is called for.

The first three directives—to be more Asian, to help schools in religious education, and to provide theological reflection on pressing social issues—deal with our task *ad extra*. Come to think of it, these are already implied in our vision-mission:

> Loyola School of Theology is a Jesuit and Filipino institution and community of learning dedicated to formative theological education and research within the Catholic tradition. It is responsive to contemporary ecclesial and social concerns for the building up and service of the Church in the Philippines and in neighboring countries.

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Thus three-hundred fifty-nine days ago, when I assumed LST's presidency (I am counting days because my first year just flew by), I described our mission in terms of its locus in our predominantly Catholic and underdeveloped archipelago of Southeast Asia and its *kairos* during the historic Second Vatican Council. Our mission entails addressing the theological concern regarding the meaning of Christian Faith for authentic worship and human development from and at this time and place in conversation with praxis and insight from other contexts. As a result, theological formation here 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.

What then do we need to do with regard to this *ad extra* task? Allow me to mention two. First, the significance of cultural literacy; we need a deeper understanding of our context. This means more than immersion (in Filipino, *babad*) in our people's lives—their *telenovelas* and their music; in other words, "their hopes and their fears," etc. (remember *Gaudium et spes*?). It means being able to read our cultural context. Cultures, it has often been pointed out, may be compared to languages, and cultural literacy consists in being able to read a particular context—how people express their hopes and fears, and how they ask ultimate questions of meaning. And much as we students of theology, including faculty, must legitimately guard our intellectual turf, we need to talk to scholars of other fields to help us understand these contexts.

Second, and this is related to the first, we need to explicitate the context from which the classic texts of, and subsequent commentaries on, our tradition come. Whether we read the Council of Trent or the work of Augustine, we come to a deeper understanding of them only when we begin to be culturally literate in their context, learn to speak in terms of *ousia* or *persona*. This applies equally to our favorite theological texts, whether they be from Karl Rahner, Juan Luis Segundo, or Aloysius Pieris.

These two guiding principles in tandem will help us accomplish our *ad extra* task, for it is through an awareness of difference that we

gain a deeper understanding of both others and ourselves as humans and Christians. If you want a throw-away line not from any "left-of-center" theologian, [here is] the first sentence of Lonergan's *Method in Theology*: "A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix."[1]

The next three directives—to improve the quality of learning, to have better management systems, and to improve our resources—are *ad intra*. Allow me once again to discuss two points. First, the recognition that learning is a dynamic process that involves student, faculty, and the wide library of wisdom. We need, therefore, to institutionalize better ways of evaluating the quality of learning through the teaching of our faculty and the performance of our students. We must review our programs, their methods of delivery, the qualifications and circumstances of our students, and the qualifications and training of our faculty.

I was overjoyed when one superior (I will not tell you which congregation) told me that our faculty should not hesitate to fail students [who] they feel have not fulfilled the requirements.

Second, the communal ownership of the resources of our school through more efficient use of resources, whether these be classrooms or the library. All these resources are at the service of our learning together, and we must not only use them but treat them with care as stewards. LST needs to improve its internal management systems and to raise funds for greater efficiency and better delivery of its services for the accomplishment of its vision-mission. And this is a task not only for administrators but for all of us.

My dear friends, in this semester, the LST community will continue its strategic planning process by going through the nitty-gritty of numbers, people, and resources. We will have to devise practical and even measurable ways of stepping closer to our shared dreams. These dreams, like those in Scriptures, involve nothing less than keeping the Faith alive in ourselves and for succeeding generations by discovering

[1]Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), xi.

fresh paths toward the Kingdom, and though realizing them is made neither easy by the complexities of our context nor straightforward by the subtlety of God's ways, let us have the audacity to dream. *Mga igsoon, dayon* (Sisters and brothers, forward)!