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IDENTITY, LIFESTYLE, AND MISSION OF THEOLOGIANS[1]

Jose V.C. Quilongquilong, S.J.

Most Rev. Honesto Ongtioco (*Bishop of Cubao*), Rev. Fr. Antonio Moreno, S.J. (*Provincial Superior)*, Rev. Fr. Jose Mario Francisco, S.J. (*past LST President*), Rev. Fr. Enrico Eusebio, S.J. (*Dean of LST*), members of the LST Board of Trustees, Most Reverend members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, esteemed members of the Diplomatic Corps, LST administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni, LST benefactors, superiors of religious communities, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

I began my theology studies at Loyola School of Theology in 1989, and I completed it with my ordination to the priesthood in 1993. I left Manila in 1999 to pursue further studies in theology, specializing in Spirituality at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. In all these years of theological studies, it never occurred to my consciousness that I would become president of LST.

[1]Inaugural address of Rev. Fr. Jose V.C. Quilongquilong, S.J., S.T.D., on the occasion of his installation as the 9th President of Loyola School of Theology (LST). Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, Philippines: July 05, 2013.

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Thus, to stand before this special academic convocation is truly a humbling experience. I acknowledge my former professors in Theology; many of them enjoy the special status of being "emeritus," and I pray for my other professors who passed away into eternal life. I thank all of them for their important role in my basic theological formation. I also follow a distinguished line of past LST presidents (those who are present here are Fr. Catalino Arevalo, Fr. Joel Tabora, and my immediate predecessor, Fr. Jose Mario Francisco).

The invitation card that was sent on this occasion featured the kneeling statue of St. Ignatius of Loyola on the grounds facing the main building of Loyola School of Theology. The image commemorates the mystical experience of St. Ignatius beside the river Cardoner in Manresa, where he stayed for ten months from March 22, 1522 to Mid-February of 1523. But what you see now in front of the LST building is St. Ignatius looking into a pool representing the river Cardoner. In the middle of the pool is a Hebrew script of the name of Jesus, "Yeshua." Since my theological formation is in the area of Spirituality, I thought that the chosen design on the invitation card by Fr. Francis Alvarez is an appropriate image as I start my mission in LST.

The mystical experience of St. Ignatius beside the river Cardoner was a turning point in his spiritual life. Ignatius described this event in his words:

> … the eyes of his understanding were opened and though he saw no vision he understood and perceived many things, numerous spiritual things as well as matters touching on faith and learning, and this was with an elucidation so bright that these things seemed new to him. He cannot expound in detail what he then understood, for they were many things, but he can state that he received such a lucidity in understanding that during the course of his entire life—now having passed his sixty-second year—if he were to gather all the helps he received from God and everything he knew, and add them together, he does not think they would add up to all that he received on that one occasion.[2]

[2] *Autobiography*, no. 31.

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In his commentary about the aforementioned event, Ignatian scholar Fr. Joseph de Guibert affirmed "that the graces which Ignatius received were in reality eminent intellectual lights, directly infused by God into his faculty of understanding."[3] This grace of mystical illumination was a radical spiritual experience of Ignatius which affected his "identity, lifestyle and mission."[4]

First is identity. Ignatius said that "the eyes of his understanding were opened and though he saw no vision *he understood and perceived numerous spiritual things touching on faith and learning.*" To understand and to perceive is "to attain awareness." This capacity to perceive is also related to discernment, the capacity to distinguish the motions of the spirit which Ignatius observed during the initial stage of his conversion in Loyola.

For Ignatius, the foundation of spiritual things is the *Lord Jesus*, the Word made flesh. The heart of *intellectus fidei* (understanding of faith) is Jesus who transformed the identity of Ignatius. According to Joseph Tylenda, "Together with the broader understanding of the faith Ignatius received a fuller realization of his vocation and possessed a clearer determination to follow Christ."[5]

Second is lifestyle. The determination of Ignatius to follow Christ meant a radical change of his lifestyle. Having donned his pilgrim's tunic at Monserrat, Ignatius began a life of penance and prayer in Manresa in imitation of the saints. It was during this period that Ignatius described "God as dealing with him in the same way a schoolteacher deals with a child while instructing him."[6] In this relationship with God, Ignatius lived the lifestyle of humility and

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[3]Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice: A Historical Study* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), 31.

[4]Cf. Marie Theresa Coombs & Francis Kelly Nemeck, *Called by God: A Theology of Vocation and Lifelong Commitment* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 2–3.

[5]Ignatius & Joseph N. Tylenda, *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), footnote 30–31.

[6]*Autobiography*, no. 27.

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poverty. It was in this context of God's dealings with Ignatius that he described his mystical illumination at the river Cardoner which confirmed his resolution to follow Christ as a pilgrim to Jerusalem, Salamanca, Paris, and finally to Rome.

Third is mission. Ignatius perceived a new vision of the world and all of reality as a result of the illumination of his understanding. His deepened perception of many spiritual things touching on faith and learning led him to greater service in his following of the Lord and shaped his apostolic vocation to help others—*ayudar las almas*! While studying theology in Paris, Ignatius attracted followers who shared his mission. And the evolution of this mission reached its full development in Rome, when Ignatius formed the Society of Jesus and directed its various ministries under the Roman Pontiff.

So the mystical illumination of Ignatius at the river Cardoner was a decisive point in his life. The illumination of his understanding deepened his understanding of faith (*intellectus fidei*) which affected his identity, lifestyle, and mission. In this regard, the monument of Ignatius in front of LST is an appropriate image to make us reflect on our identity, lifestyle, and mission as theologians.

The document issued by the Vatican International Theological Commission last year (2012), entitled "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria," provides clear orientations about theology. This document is composed of three chapters: first is "Listening to the Word of God"; second is "Abiding in the Communion of the Church"; and third is "Giving an Account of the Truth of God." In his address to the International Theological Commission, Benedict XVI said that "the document seeks to present, so to speak, the genetic code of Catholic theology, namely, the principles that define its identity and consequently guarantee its unity in diversity of its achievements."

With the aforementioned experience of Ignatius as our inspiration and with the guidance of the document "Theology Today" as the "genetic code of Catholic theology," I seek to outline our mission as theologians of LST in terms of our identity, lifestyle, and mission.

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On the Theologian's Identity

Chapter one of "Theology Today" underlines the central place of God's Word in theology. The document affirms that "theology, in all its diverse traditions, disciplines and methods, is founded on the fundamental act of listening in faith to the revealed Word of God, Christ himself. Listening to God's Word is the definitive principle of Catholic theology."[7]

Therefore, the theologian's identity is anchored on listening to the Word of God. The theologian is first a listener, a hearer of God's word. We know how creation came to be through the power of God's Word (*Dabar Adonai*), so my identity as a theologian is rooted in this listening to the creative power of God's word. The theologian's identity is also shaped by a faith response to the Word of God. As affirmed in the document, "the act of faith, in response to the Word of God, opens the intelligence of the believer to new horizons … in this light, faith contemplates the whole world in a new way; it sees it more truly because, empowered by the Holy Spirit, it shares in God's own perspective."[8] This quotation echoes the illumination experience of Ignatius at the river Cardoner.

LST has given primacy of place to the study of the Word of God in its theological programs. You can check the impressive line-up of our biblical scholars on the souvenir program. This is important since "scripture is the soul of theology." Scripture gives the proper identity of our theological enterprise.

On the Theologian's Lifestyle

Chapter two of "Theology Today" speaks about "Abiding in the Communion of the Church." It is within this communion in the

[7]International Theological Commission, "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria" (Vatican, 2012), no. 4.

[8]"Theology Today," no. 16.

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Church that theologians find a home for their theological inquiries. It is within this communion in the Church that theologians "endeavor to open wide the Scriptures to the Christian faithful."[9] It is within this communion in the Church that theologians preserve the fidelity to the Apostolic tradition. Thus, the lifestyle of theologians is marked by communion and the readiness to collaborate with the different states of life in the Church.

The lifestyle of communion for theologians is marked by "adherence to the magisterium in its various gradations."[10] In this regard, the theologians recognize the "competence of bishops, and especially of the college of bishops headed by the pope, to give authentic interpretation of the Word of God handed on in Scripture and Tradition."[11] The presence of our bishops in this convocation underlines the ecclesial bond between LST as an Ecclesiastical Faculty and the bishops.

LST has been active in collaborating with various events and initiatives of the local Church, theological faculties, seminaries, and other sectors of civil society. Our professors have been asked for their expert advice on various matters affecting the Church not only in the Philippines but also in the other Churches in Asia through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. LST is also a place of cultural communion as it annually forms close to 400 students coming from twenty countries not only from Asia but from as far as Europe, Africa, and Latin America.

LST's relationship with the Ateneo de Manila University and its collaboration with other Jesuit educational networks, and its participation in international programs like the Asian Mandate of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific, also highlight the school's openness to dialogue with other academic institutions.

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[9] "Theology Today," no. 24.

[10] "Theology Today," no. 44.

[11] "Theology Today," no. 44.

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Thus, the fruitfulness of our vocation as theologians truly depends on our rootedness in ecclesial communion. Pope Paul VI said that "The task of the theologian is carried out with a view to building up ecclesial communion so that the People of God may grow in the experience of faith."[12]

On the Theologian's Mission

Chapter three of "Theology Today" speaks of "Giving an Account of the Truth of God." To give an account is to give an explanation of the truth of God. Thus, the mission of theologians is "to translate into scientific discourse the Word of God expressed in revelation."[13] In the language of Ignatius, this discourse is about "conversations"—spiritual conversations about God which is central to Ignatian spirituality.

In its theological work of articulating the truth of God's revelation, LST has been intensely involved in fulfilling its vision and mission "to educate in the faith, sustain personal theological growth, and assist in the effective empowerment of all who desire to serve God's people by ministries in and of the Church."[14]

Also, LST has been involved in nation building and was at the forefront in responding to various issues and challenges affecting our country. Our professors and students are actively involved in their respective fields of mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Many of our alumni (a number of them are bishops) are recognized and appreciated for their particular service of offering the divine truth in an intelligible form. In particular, the scientific work of theological research and the publication of articles in our LST Journal "Landas" are important

[12]Pope Paul VI, Letter Le transfert a Louvain-la-Neuve to the Rector of the Catholic University of Louvain, September 13, 1975 (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 22–23, 1975). Also cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* 19 (AAS 71 [1979]: 305ff).

[13]"Theology Today," no. 60.

[14]Cf. LST Vision and Mission, http://lst.edu/about-us/vision-a-mission.

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in fostering "the unity of theology in a plurality of methods and disciplines."[15] Our theological research is also open to other sciences and cultural trends which lead to new frontiers of engagement with post-modern culture today.

Thanks to Fr. Mario Francisco

At this point, I wish to express the gratitude of the whole LST community to Fr. Jose Mario Francisco who served for seven years as president of LST. In the last issue of the LST student publication "Tinig Loyola," Mario articulated his consolations and desolations as president. Among the consolations he mentioned are the following: "opening doors to diverse voices from outside and facing long-term issues within; working with local Churches through JCAP and the Asian Mandate, linking with international theological centers beyond our region, cooperating with the Jesuit educational network; exploring ways of addressing management and financial concerns." For desolations, Mario mentioned "the sense that administration is never ending. No sooner has one finished with an issue when another issue erupts."

In the same interview, Mario also gave an advice to his successor and this is now directed to me: "To keep his cool. More seriously though, I hope he would listen to voices not only from outside but also from within LST. They would cue him where to go. For instance, I wished that I had done more to encourage and support our faculty in doing more research and writing."

Again, thank you Fr. Mario for your service and for your kind words of advice. Now you deserve a break from your desolations.

Theology and Spiritual Experience

In conclusion, I wish to underline the special relationship between theology and spiritual experience which brings us back to the religious

[15]"Theology Today," no. 85.

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experience of Ignatius at the river Cardoner. As affirmed in "Theology Today," there is a close link between theology and spiritual experience, "which it enlightens and by which in turn it is nourished, and of its nature it opens into an authentic wisdom with a lively sense of the transcendence of the God of Jesus Christ."[16]

The statue of Ignatius in front of LST depicts him kneeling on the ground, his right hand holding a walking staff and his eyes fixed on the Hebrew script of the name of Jesus, "Yeshua," on the floor. As I begin my new mandate as President, I see myself kneeling down before the mystery of God. The task ahead is enormous since I take this responsibility with my other mission as rector of Loyola House of Studies. But I trust in the confidence, competence, and collaboration of the LST community: administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and our benefactors. In this Year of Faith, in the first year of the papacy of Pope Francis, the first Jesuit pope, in communion with our bishops and all church communities, we renew our commitment to make the message of Christ known to all the ends of the earth.

Last June 23, I celebrated Sunday Mass in the chapel of Barangay San Isidro, a relocation site in Montalvan, Rizal. Hundreds of people were relocated there after they lost their homes as a result of Typhoon Ondoy. After the Mass, Bro. Ernald Andal invited the people to pray for me, for my new mission as LST President. During the period of silent prayer, I felt deep consolation and communion with our poor. In prayer, I felt their *sensus fidelium* ("the intimate sense of spiritual realities that the faithful have"). At that moment, I felt like being installed as president. This experience reminded me that theology must take account of the *sensus fidei*, the *sensus fidelium* especially of our poor. The document "Theology Today" points out "that theologians depend on the *sensus fidelium*, because the faith that they explore and explain lives in the people of God."[17]

[16]"Theology Today," no. 60.

[17]"Theology Today," no. 35.

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So together we pray, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph her most chaste spouse, St. Ignatius and all the saints, that "the eyes of our understanding may be opened so that we may understand and perceive many things, numerous spiritual things on faith and learning" and be always enlightened by God's Wisdom. Ultimately, theology "implies a striving for holiness and an ever-deeper awareness of the transcendence of the mystery of God."[18]

In the end, we are reduced to silence as we contemplate the glory of God. Amen.

Maraming salamat po!

[18]"Theology Today," no. 99.

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