TO WANDER AND
TO ENGAGE THE WORLD
The Role of the LST Alumni Association*

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Let me start with Fr. Clark’s wonderful historical account of the beginnings of Loyola School of Theology (LST). What captured my imagination when I was reading his address was the reference to the 38 years of wandering until LST found a home. And those 38 years were years of discernment. Where does a school of theology belong? Where will it fulfill its mission well? Is it in the city? Is it in the countryside? After 38 years and for various reasons, which were not really planned by Fr. Clark and the General, LST is now settled in one place—this place.

But we also want to believe that—through its professors, students, alumni and staff—LST continues to wander. In many ways, LST has not settled in one place. Through us, especially through our missionary outreach and our ministries, LST continues to wander through different styles of life, through different involvements in the Church and in the world, through different ministries in cities, in barangays, in cathedrals, in chapels, in factories, in schools, in con-

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1See Francis X. Clark, “In the Service of the Church,” this issue, 134-143.
vents, in formation houses, in families. And now, as we start the new millennium, I think it is just proper to look at LST as being on a continuous journey, continuously wandering, still trying to locate where we belong, where we should be.

The results of the alumni survey show us very wonderful things about how LST has influenced our lives.² I want to single out one basic contribution of LST identified by many of the students. It is how theology—how their theological studies here at LST—helped them to get involved more in the realities of the world. You would think that theology would give people wings so that they can escape from the world. But no. What people appreciated in their stay here at LST was how their theological studies brought them closer to the world, brought them into a new presence in the world. So without being self-congratulatory, I can say that based on the results of the alumni survey, we are trying and, probably in our own ways, we are succeeding in doing theology at its best—theology which is pastoral in intent and very missionary in its soul, a theology that does not disdain the world, a theology that helps people enter the world and understand its cries, its hopes, its anguish, its sorrows.

The LST Alumni Association (AA) has a strong desire for theological updating. I would like to understand updating not so much in terms of alumni just listening to talks given by top rate theologians. We could understand updating to mean that as we confront new realities—as LST, through its alumni, professors, and students, continues to wander—we want to be able to look at these realities with fresh eyes, with ever new eyes, because the faith always gives us a fresh look at reality. Can we be brought closer to new realities? How can we bring theology to intersect with those new realities? Hopefully, as we continue with our journeys and our wanderings, the Christian faith could be made more vibrant through our contribution.

I will address the concern about the role of the LST AA in two

²Unpublished survey conducted prior to the 2nd LST Alumni Homecoming by the officers of the LST Alumni Association.
parts. I will start with a description of the third millennium. Then, within that context, I will suggest some directions for the LST AA.

The Third Millennium

In many ways, the new millennium is very exciting. New possibilities are being opened to us. The third millennium has started with a lot of promise but at the same time it has started with a lot of uncertainties. We do not know where we are really going. We face a lot of ambiguities. We do not even know the meanings of words now.

Tomorrow I will address the Pambansang Samahan ng Sikolohiya [National Association of Psychology]. They’re celebrating their 25th anniversary and their theme is: “Ang Kaugnayan ng Espiritualidad at Sekswalidad sa Kamalayan Pilipino” [The relationship between spirituality and sexuality in the Filipino consciousness].

Nagbabasa ako at karamihan sa sinasabi ng babae, “Kapag gagamitin ka ng iyong asawa....” Gagamitin. Anong spirituality iyan? “Kapag ginalaw ka....” Ginalaw. Parang pagkalayu-layo ng tinuturo natin dito tungkol sa kasal at matrimonyo. Pero nasa kamalayan. Gamit. Kapag ginamit ka ng iyong asawa. At yung iba ang sasabihin, “Kapag inano ka....” Inano. Ano yung “ano”? [I was reading for my address and women say repeatedly, “When I am used by my husband....” Used. What kind of spirituality is that? “When I am handled....” Handled. It seems to be very different from what we teach here about weddings and matrimony. But it is in women’s consciousness. Use. When your husband uses you. And the others say, “When he does that to me....” That. What is “that”?] Even the meanings of words have been shifting. But let me, in a quick fashion, just give some signposts that will help us understand the third millennium of Christianity.

The most obvious is that this is the age of global economies, where boundaries are being broken down and the transfer of capital happens so swiftly. But of course, the transfer of capital is true only for those who are already economically strong. They have the capital to transfer and they do not need to fear boundaries. For them, the
boundaries have collapsed. But if you talk to the owner of a sari-sari [variety] store down there in Barangka, you tell him or her, “Uy Trese, globalization na, no more boundaries, you can go and set up a shop there in Manhattan.” Magagawa ba naman ng pobrego Trese iyan? Hindi [Can poor Trese do that? No]. Globalization is actually some sort of a glamorized version of a new invasion.

More frightening I suppose—disturbing and more related to our concern as a school of theology—is the globalization of culture. There seems to be one culture that is being exported and it is now being proposed as the unifying element: the culture that will unify humanity, the culture that will provide communion, the culture that will provide a Catholic spirit, the culture that will form us into men and women that will somehow understand one another.

In one conference, Romeo Intengan said that this global culture which is being exported and bought uncritically by many is not anymore inspired by religious values. This global culture is quite neopagan in inspiration—very secular, very conservative, very materialistic.

Another aspect of the culture that is developing in the present millennium is irreverence. I do not know whether this is part of globalization but there is much irreverence right now. Everything is de-mythologized. The sense of the sacred is gone. If you are very sacral you are corny. You are out of this world. Even we contribute to that. When people call priests “Father,” they tell people, “Kuya na lang.” Or, kung hindi “kuya,” “tolo” na lang. Pero yung mga ganoong reverential terms, parang wala na [Just call me “older brother.” Or, if not “older brother,” “grandfather” will do. But reverential terms like these are used less and less].

Gone are the days when people walking along Roxas Boulevard, as they approached the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, would

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3Romeo J. Intengan, S.J., at the Meeting of Superiors and Directors of Work, Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus, at the Institute of Social Order, Ateneo de Manila University, on 17 Jul 2001.
stop their chatting momentarily and make the sign of the cross. *Ngayon wala na. Saan tayo nagrirmisa ngayon?* [That is no longer the case. Where do we say mass now?] In the malls—the centers of consumerism and materialism. Now, I do not know whether this is evangelization. Once I was asked in one meeting to address this issue: What happens now to the eucharist when it is not celebrated where your regular community is located? What happens to the eucharist when it is celebrated by people who are communities at the moment and afterwards disperse and go to their different concerns, etc.? What does it mean now when we say, “The Church makes the eucharist and the eucharist makes the Church”?

Still, we have to study these transparochial realities which are, in a way, more vibrant than the base communities. Some phenomena are emerging which indicate that our sense of the sacred is shifting. Where is the sense of the sacred now? Is it not anymore in the cathedral? If not, where is it? It is in the mall. When you celebrate Mass in the malls, you see that the people are very fervent and they sing the *Ama Namin* [Our Father] with eyes closed. But when they go to their regular parishes, they don’t show the same fervor. *Ano na kaya ang nangyayari?* [What is going on?] This must be studied.

A third aspect of our culture right now is disillusionment. From the last century, we survived two World Wars and and held on to the promise of a good life, a more peaceful life, a more just humanity, a more humane human family. But all of those promises collapsed. And we have hanging there, on top of us, this pall of disillusionment. Human progress is just considered a myth. We see this outlook manifested in the lack of trust and confidence in human institutions and human leaders. Talk to the tricycle drivers when election time comes and they will always say, “It doesn’t matter. *Kabiti sino nandiyan, wala namang nababago sa buhay namin. Ayoko nang umasa. Mabibigo pa uli ako*” [Whoever holds power makes no difference in our lives. I don’t want to expect anything anymore. I will only get frustrated again]. And even the Church leadership and its institutions are affected by a similar disillusionment.

Another concern is the continuing exclusion of the poor. Even
with all the technological and scientific progress that, among others, produces better food, provides people with cures, and makes life more comfortable, not much changes for the poor. They remain poor and they are increasing in number. Many poor people have just resigned themselves to the reality that their children, and their children's children, will not be better off than they are right now. What is painful is their continuing exclusion. PCP II has already said that the Church will be a Church of the Poor—the poor being the center of gravity in the Church—and that the poor will evangelize the whole Church. Pero ten years later, nung nagmiting yung pastoral consultation, ganon pa rin ang tanong, “Sino ba talaga ang ‘poor’?” [But ten years later, when a pastoral consultation was held, the question is still the same, “Who are the ‘poor’?”]

Exclusion continues—not only of the materially poor, but also of the socially and culturally poor. The crucifixions of the poor are daily occurrences in our third millennium. With all the sophisticated weapons and arms that we have, this persecution, this crucifixion could even lead to the annihilation of the whole human family beginning with the environment.

Notice also the dissipation of human energy. This disturbs me because I see this even among the young. Before coming here I had a conference with a group of deacons who will be ordained priests in two weeks. After the first fifteen minutes of my sharing, they were already tired. Parang wala nang energy [They looked like they had lost their energy]. I don't know whether the problem was with me or with them.

One indication of this low energy level is boredom. Young people get bored so early in life. They have not lived enough and yet they are already bored with life. To remedy the boredom, they create—according to them—a lot of “gimmicks”; or according to the young priests, “happenings”; and according to the not-so-young, “racket.” People are looking for occasions to shift. For me—I've told this to many audiences so many times—the best symbol of this desire to keep on shifting is the television remote control. Lipat nang lipat [We keep on changing channels].
Shifting has been made comfortable, effortless. In a short span of time, you can see so many shows without beginning anything decently, without ending anything decently and this is what we call relaxation. We call it recreation. My worry is that, apparently, the solution to the dissipation of energy and boredom is to be content with bits and pieces even if these are not connected in a meaningful whole. People are getting used to life as segments that may not be interconnected with one another. What I fear is that people will start thinking like this: A complete life is a boring life; a complete story is a boring story. An interesting story, an interesting life is a life that has had numerous shifts. Unity of life is not a goal anymore. It makes your life boring. It means our attention span and our excitement with life are confined to one segment.

I just returned from Naga where I attended a meeting of the seminary formators of Southern Luzon. One question they asked was this, “Is it still realistic to expect of our present candidates lifetime commitment when mentalities, when minds and hearts are already formed into this normal state of fragmentation of attention? How true will a lifetime commitment be to them?”

These questions apply to marriage as well. It is now common to get phone calls from people who have been married three years, four years, to tell you, “Father, I just want to leave my wife.” “Why? Is there any serious reason?” Wala. Sasabihin lang, “Sawa na ako eh” [Nothing. They will simply say, “I am bored”]. When we reflect on this boredom, we ask: What gives energy? What gave our parents energy? What gave the founders of Loyola School of Theology energy? What gave a Martin Luther King the energy to fight and to die?

Vision. Dreams. “I have a dream.” When there are dreams, when there are powerful, gripping dreams, we always have energy, spare energy. We can always find some silent, dark nook there in our hearts where we will find some new spring of life and energy. But those are discovered when we have vision, when we have dreams. And the person with vision will have something to die for, and if one has something to die for, then one will have something to live for. One will have energy to die and, of course, one will have energy to live.
I remember Bishop Felix Perez (of Imus). Before he suffered his fatal heart attack, he prepared a recollection to be given to the seminarians of Tahanan ng Mabuting Pastol [Home of the Good Shepherd] but he was not able to give that recollection. However, they discovered his retreat notes and on the first page were written the words,

The reason for my dying is the Jesus whom I love and the people whom I have loved. And therefore, the reason for my living is the same Jesus and the people whom I have loved.

A man of vision. He would willingly die. He would have the energy to die. And it bothers me when I see young people without energy. My fear is, are we facing a millennium where people don’t have compelling visions, no compelling dreams and therefore no energy?

What are the dreams of our people now? To own a cellphone. I was talking with a young woman who just graduated from college. I asked her, “What is your dream in life?” “Father, my dream is I want to have the best cellphone available.” You call that a dream? If that is a dream, you will not have energy, for that is not the type of dream that will stir in us the flames of energy.

In talking to you about this dissipation of energy, this boredom, this heaviness, I hope I am mistaken when I say that this could be an indication that we are beginning the millennium without a clear gripping vision for ourselves and for the next generation. This lack of vision leads to a kind of violence committed by people who are frustrated and bored. They grasp for control in their desire to engineer the kind of life they would like to have but which is beyond their reach. This violence is coupled with intolerance of the other which is a very puzzling thing. At a time when globalization is being sold to us—as one humanity, no more frontiers, no more boundaries, a global culture, a global civilization, a global economy—we become more and more intolerant of the other, and the others are becoming scapegoats for the ills that we find in our society. Akala ko, global na pero lumalakas pa rin ang pagka-parochial [I thought we had gone global already but the parochial mindset is still getting stronger].

Just take Cavite. It is one of the fastest growing urban and indus-
trial centers of Luzon and I hear the old Caviteños especially my relatives talking this way, “Mabuti pa noong panahon namin” [Things were better during our younger years]. Cavite was very peaceful. The air was fresh. A lot of mango trees, bamboo, etc. You know everyone. The idyllic past. And they say, “Ngayon, tingnan mo na. Ang gulugulo. Ang dami nang drugs. Ang dami nang ganito. Ang init-init. Ang daming dayo kasi, yung mga taga-labas pumasok na eh” [Now, there is a lot of disorder. A lot of drug problems. A lot of other things. It is very hot. All because there are a lot of migrants; outsiders have begun to settle here].

And I tell them, “Pero nung wala iyang mga iyan magulo rin naman ak. Nandiyan si Nardong Putik. Nandiyan yung mga holduppers. Nandiyan yung mga carnappers.” Pero hindi iyan titingnan na masama. Hindi. You cannot use yourselves as scapegoats. Pero bayan, meron nang scapegoats: the others [“But even before the migrants came, there was already disorder. There was Nardong Putik. There were the holduppers. There were the carnappers.” But these are not considered evil. No, you cannot. So you look for scapegoats: the others].

Is this a very dark description of the millennium? Yes, but at the same time, as in the past lessons that we learned as Church, it is usually in those dark moments when the Spirit blows mightily. The Spirit of hope. This millennium is a millennium not only of ambiguities and uncertainties, but also a millennium of a lot of promise and hope—hope for the search of a new humanity, the search for a new way of being human and being a human family.

The LST Alumni Association

With that, let me go to the last portion of my talk, the role of the Loyola School of Theology Alumni Association. If this is the context of the present millennium, let me make a few suggestions. I know the alumni of LST cannot make the AA their life’s concern, so let us be realistic. Let us try to be modest but at the same time make a dent.
First, picking up from Fr. Clark's history of LST, I would like to see the alumni of LST continue the itinerant nature of the school. Through the alumni, let LST continue its wandering in the world of the present millennium. By that I mean let us engage the hard realities of the world as we see them unfolding right now. Let us engage them in theological reflection so that we will be led by the new phenomena into a re-reading of the Christian sources. Let us allow the phenomena to challenge the Christian tradition so that the Christian tradition will be able to reveal more of its wealth to us. *Marami pa iyan eh. Marami pang wealth ang Christian tradition. Kalilangan lang hilahin* [The Christian tradition still has a lot of wealth to offer. We just have to draw out its richness]. And this is a wonderful time for the Christian tradition to show much more of its resources and its wealth.

At the same time, let us look at the world, let us engage the world with the eyes of faith. From what we got here at LST—fidelity to the sources of faith—we look to the world with the eyes of faith and we look to the faith with the eyes of the contemporary world. If you are a school teacher, then do this in school. That way you are the prolongation of LST's wandering in your school. Wherever we are, let us continue engaging the world in the name of LST and theological reflection.

Second, I suggest that the LST AA form communities of critical faith reflection. The survey results show a strong desire among the alumni that the LST AA provide fellowship, communion. Can we possibly, as an association, form even informal communities of critical faith reflection. Through these communities of critical faith reflection, the alumni association may serve as a clearinghouse of experiences, of questions, of ventures, of debates, of pastoral and missionary reflection.

Third, may I suggest that the LST AA feed the school with our own questions, the questions that we are hearing in the world, especially in our areas of ministry. Maybe we can help put flesh to the world and make it present in the classroom. The world must not disappear in the classroom. Perhaps we alumni—because we are al-
ready there, wandering in the different corners of the world—can bring the concerns and questions arising from our experience in the contemporary world into creative and critical class discussion and reflection.

Finally, I see that the LST AA can be an agent of hope, individually and corporately, in our world of ambiguities, darkness and uncertainties. We can be beacons of fidelity to God in this ambiguous and uncertain world, but more than that, I hope LST alumni could opt for change. Who are agents of hope? Agents of hope are those who long for change. I hate to say this, but people who enjoy the benefits of the status quo seldom become agents of hope. For why will they desire change? They are already benefitting from the world as it is. Hope will come from people who are crying out for change. I hope the LST alumni will not be too comfortable. I would like to see the graduates of LST restless, not comfortable, not people who will sit on their laurels and say, “The world is treating us very well.” When people learn that we graduated from LST, they bow and give us all the comforts. When that happens, that is a danger signal. It means we will be buying into the status quo, we might not opt for change and we might not be agents of hope.

LST began with 38 years of wandering. I suppose its vocation is to keep wandering. Wonder and wander. LST cannot be settled in one place. Even if it has already found a place, wonderfully in union with San Jose Seminary and the Ateneo de Manila University, LST will need to continue to wander because it looks to the reign of God and it moves from corner to corner, from hut to hut, from province to province, from country to country, from diocese to diocese, from heart to heart, evoking hope in men and women.