



Curriculum Theologiae

A Reflection on Fr. Felix Wilfred's, Fr. Pattery's and Fr. Rayappan's Papers

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A Reflection on Fr. Felix Wilfred's, Fr. Pattery's and Fr. Rayappan's Papers

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Good Morning! First of all I would like to say thanks to the organizer of this conference. It is a great honor for me to have a chance to be on the same panel with Fr. Felix Wilfred, Fr. Pattery and Fr. Rayappan. Last week I received their papers and a request from Prof. Annett Meuthrath for my comments. As soon as I read them, I immediately realized that, in their papers, they have appropriately discussed the key critical issues which relate to how we can create conditions that will lead to a proper methodological formation within the context of contemporary theological education. In general, I can speak about no profound disagreements with what is said by the three Fathers' in their papers. I can only add observations of my own which could be discussed in the context of contemporary theological discipline and formation.

So, first of all, I would like to indicate some general common points as these relate to the same issues which are discussed by them, although, in a Korean context. Then, I will add some reflections and then ask a number of questions.

In Korea, the discipline of theology or religious studies has largely developed in in three different contexts within both Catholicism and Protestantism. The first context refers to independent theological seminaries or colleges of theology which also offer courses in religious education, pastoral counseling, or religious music. These institutions provide no training in the social

sciences nor, in general, in any science with the exception of courses and seminars in philosophy. This is especially the case in Catholic schools. The main purpose of these institutions is to train educators and future Church leaders. For the sake of this mission, not much is said about the good or the value of other disciplines although we can sometimes speak about the existence of "liberal" theological schools. Liberal theology schools tend to adopt the kind of insight and understanding which we find in the praxis of social science, incorporating these insights into how the method of theology is to be understood. We find that this kind of approach is particularly common in Protestant seminaries or Protestant theological colleges. The Catholic schools tend to be more traditional in their approach. The kind of theological formation which they provide emphasizes the value of the Korean context.

The second context refers to seminaries or Bible schools which offer a program of study that is exclusively theological. These schools are recognized by their respective denominations or parish churches but they are not recognized by the Korean Ministry of Education as institutes of higher learning. Hence, these schools cannot be governed by directives that would come to them from the Korean Ministry of Education. Because of restrictions that are imposed by a denominational or local church curriculum, they cannot deal with questions that ask about the right method or the right way of doing theology nor can they raise questions that would turn to what can be learned from the existence of other disciplines. In general, these schools are very conservative in their thinking and understanding and so they cannot refer to any methodological insights which could come to them from the practice of the social sciences and they are similarly not interested in dealing with questions which refer to the role of history and culture in the cultivation of a good form of theological formation.

The third context refers to the place and role of a university. We refer here

not to an independent school of Theology but to departments of Theology, Christian Studies, or Religious Studies as these would exist within a College of Humanities. In these places, methodological issues are seriously considered and methodological insights are freely imported from other disciplines if these can be of help to the life and progress of the kind of work that is done within theology.

Nevertheless, within this context, traditional approaches to theological study are emphasized both at Catholic universities and at a number of Protestant universities. As a consequence thus of this general trend, the kind of work which is done within a department of Religious Studies is not welcomed within a department or a school which exists as a school of theology. Hence, unfortunately, tensions sometimes exist between the faculties of Theology and those belonging to Religious Studies. Some departments of Religious Studies also reject questions or subjects which directly refer to theological issues of one kind or another. Conversely, theological faculties tend to raise doubts about the value of having discussions which seem to refer to the subject matter of Religious Studies.

In addition, Theology and Religious Studies are not perceived properly or respectfully by other departments belonging to the University. Other faculty and departments tend to think that Theology and Religious Studies should not exist within the context of a modern University. These disciplines are lacking in the kind of subject matter which they should have if they are to exist as proper subjects for the conduct of research. Hence, because these biases exist within departments and schools of thought which are influential within our world today responding to today's global market, departments of Theology and Religious Studies must struggle for the kind of freedom and support which they need if, in their own right, they are to prosper and flourish and to be of help to their students.

If we look back in time, we notice a number of changes and developments.

During the time and the struggle for democratization within Korea, the departments and faculties of Theology and Religious Studies were highly respected within academia since the faculties and students belonging to Theology and Religious Studies participated actively in the struggle for Korean democratization. In these years, a new kind of thinking emerged within theology: "minjung theology (or, in other words, Korean liberation theology)." No academic doubts were raised at this time by persons who belonged to other academic disciplines. However, the situation radically changed after the implementation and success of Korean democratization. No more democratization is now being demanded within Korean society. Instead, what is being demanded is a rigid kind of academic research which is determined and which is measured by current market demands as these exist within our contemporary modern society. Hence, within this new context, doubts are raised by other disciplines about the value of Theology and Religious Studies. These doubts and questions do not extend only to the subject matter of theology but also questions are asked about the kind of method which should exist within theology.

Unfortunately, most faculties belonging to Theology or Religious Studies do not respond to these questions which are being asked by persons who work in other disciplines. More often than not, these questions are avoided or, on the other hand, theology or religious studies faculty sometimes defend the value of their work by engaging in procedural maneuvers of one kind or another, hiding behind the wording of various university regulations and invoking the authority of boards of trustees which exist in the government of a university. Hence, as a result, no real dialectic or no real engagement with other disciplines exists.

As the three papers have mentioned directly or indirectly in relation to the excellence matters for theological formation, the real issue is not the question of subject matter but, rather, the existence of methodological issues, although,

unfortunately, the subject matter of theology and religious studies is being questioned within the academia of our day. Hence, to some extent, if we could have more engagement with other contemporary disciplines other than what exists in the humanities, there should be a lessening of this difficulty since most doubts about the subject matter of theology and religious studies are explained by a traditional set of biases that have come down to us from the birth of modern science and the age of the Enlightenment which had extolled the autonomy of human reason. Hence, in the long run, I doubt if these traditional modern biases will continue to maintain the influence which they have had in recent years within Korean academic circles.

The real issue, at bottom, is with respect to the methodology of Theology and Religious Studies. If the methodology of theology and religious studies could be clarified in connection with methodological discussions as these exist within the human and social sciences, then, in attending to the future of Theology and Religious Studies, we should find elements or features which would touch on the deeper issues and reality of our human existence than what we find in other disciplines and methodologies. In this sense, as Fr. Felix Wilfred notes, contemporary theological studies should deal with three things: (1) empirical data (as they are given to us within a particular context); (2) a critical interpretation of this data which transcends what could be given to us through some kind of experimental, positivistic, scientific enquiry; and (3) the necessity of a critical check which would refer to a "purification" of preconceived, unconscious biases which belong to individual or collective agents who engage in the work of theological activity. I think that this general spirit resembles the views of Peter Berger who urges the value of a healthy dialectical tension which should exist between theology and social science, a dialectic which transcends the exclusion or the separation of social science from theology or which should forestall the possible capitulation of theology in the face of demands that are being presented

or which emerge from the common practice of social science.

As I have already noted, I find no key disagreements between myself and the kind of emphasis which we find in the three papers when they speak about methodological issues for the excellence matter within the context of theological formation. However, for a deeper understanding of methodological issues as they relate to the question of theological formation, I would like to ask the following three questions.

First, I would like to address three questions to three speakers. In their thinking, as a theoretical source or ground of support, are they thinking about the methodological speculations of any given theologian? In reading their papers, I find myself thinking about the work of Bernard Lonergan and his book, *Method in Theology*. I am not sure whether my guess is relevant or not but I sense a resemblance which could be derivative or which could exist as a distinct but parallel development. I refer here to the specifics of Fr. Felix's argument: (1) the importance of empirical data and its basis in human experience, (2) the critical interpretation of this data as a process of understanding the data, and (3) checking the processes of data collection while also attending to proffered interpretations by way of a "purification" of biases whether or not these refer to conscious or unconscious biases with respect to opinions or points of view which refer to gender, class, politics, or matters that are specifically religious. I think that this could be also applied to the specifics of Fr. Pattery's "integral perception of any reality" and its outcome as "com-passionate mind and heart" for theological formation. In contrast Fr. Rayappan does not deal much about the cognitive issue that the two Fathers' concern for the theological formation but gives a good sociological review of the situation in India with respect to how the work of theology is being encouraged in an institutional way.

What we find here are ongoing processes that are needed if we are to move

toward a deeper encountering of our human reality as this can be grasped within the context of a theological formation of our understanding. As Lonergan had noted in his magnum opus, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, the process of moving from empirical data collection to the purification of our understanding is something which occurs within us as human subjects: human subjects who can also exist as theological subjects, seeking theological understanding. In other words, as human subjects, we experience data and, by collecting data, we create or construct our data. We bring it before us, to our consciousness more clearly. Then, we question our data in order to move toward an understanding which exists within our minds (our intellectual consciousness). And then, we judge our understanding to see if it is right or wrong (true or false) in order to know about the truth or the reality of our theological activity. This does not happen simply once but, if we are alive, questioning, thinking, and understanding, we are engaged in these activities in a continuous, ongoing way. In our theological formation, we are constantly experiencing, understanding, and judging and, after our judgments, we are deciding about how we should respond through our actions to what we have come to understand and know, using our minds initially moving from what has been given to us through our acts of sense.

Second, I would like to ask a question about whether it is possible for an individual theologian to proceed in a manner which accords with what Fr. Felix and Fr. Rayappan's are apparently suggesting when, in the context of our theological formation, we are confronted with a mass of materials which come to us not only from the data and the developments of social science but also from what is given to us from within the subject matter of theology. I think thus that what we need is a division of labor within theology if theologians are to work in a manner which builds human community, leading to the experience and the reality of human solidarity. I frankly think that it is very difficult for a theologian to do all these tasks properly: collect all relevant data from a wide variety of

sources; understand how a number of different elements all relate to each other; and then judge the reasonableness of his/her theological understanding in a manner of reflection which would lead to an inner purification of self: ways of thinking and acting which reveal the world in a different way and which would engage in a form of mutual dialogue between social science and theology. I think thus that we need a new paradigm for the work of theology if, within the praxis of theology, theologians are not only to work with each other but if they are also to find ways of working with persons who belong to other disciplines and fields.

Third, I would like to ask a question how we can possibly undermine or how we can convert the present global prejudices which exist in current academic settings: prejudices which reject the good or the possible value of theological or religious study. As many of you probably know, contrary to beliefs that expect the demise of religious belief in our modern society, religious questions point to key issues which exist within our human world: the absence, in fact, of a divorce between what exists in religion and what happens within politics and in the life of any given society. Yet, in modern academia, we continue to encounter a habitual prejudice which rejects the value of research in anything that pertains to the subject of theology and religion. Religious issues are understood or they are not understood since the context is a restricted point of view which wants to remove religion from any kind of place that it could have within the public sector of our human life. In Korea, this has recently become a critical issue. Under our last government, much tension arose between a number of Christian and Buddhist groups.

Today, in the name of a separation that should exist between religion and the state, religious education is not to be given as a regular part of the school curriculum but only as an alternative subject in universities which are funded by the Korean Ministry of Education and also in secondary schools that have been

founded in past years by missionary groups of one kind or another, belonging to different religious groups. "Atheist" associations who style themselves as "free thinker" groups now take umbrage at religious persons and groups and the deference which has been shown to these groups in the public sectors of Korean life. On the basis of what has been happening in Korea, I find myself wondering if the same kind of thing will also happen in India. How will India deal with a new kind of pluralism which opposes persons and groups who reject religion with other persons and groups who are ostensibly religious, living in a manner which accords with traditional religious belief?

All these things being said about methodological issues for the theological excellence formation and its contextualization, I would like to consider a parameter to move forward the issue with you. As a point of departure for understanding how questions about method can be resolved in theology and as a point of departure which can help other persons better understand the nature of their own disciplines how their inquiries can be framed and constructed and what kind of relation exists between one discipline and another, can we not devote our attention to discovering and articulating a general philosophy of mind which can be used as a guide for asking and answering questions which relate to questions about method as this would apply in any given discipline? If defective philosophies of mind explain why, in contemporary academia, we find truncations of horizon which point to a lessening of a world which is regarded as properly intelligible (what is intelligible is what is real), can we begin to resolve this problem in a direct fashion if we can speak about our human cognition in a manner which attends to how the principle of self-transcendence exists as a species of first principle in our human cognition? I deliberately state my case by asking these questions since, by their asking, we can perhaps pause and question some of our own assumptions about the nature of our human cognition, attending now to how our assumptions have been determining the kinds of

questions which we have been asking and some of the conclusions which we have been reaching in the context of our own work in the discipline of theology. As theologians who know, at some level, that bad theology is explained by bad perception of reality, we can take up a task that calls for a radical kind of cognitive analysis which attends to desires that exist within our consciousness of self: desires which seek a relation with something which is other than ourselves. We attend to these desires and, if we can follow them, we should be able to construct a new basis or a new foundation for a re-ordering of studies which is needed within our system of education if our human order is not to collapse on itself for want of a sense of higher purpose and goals that can elicit from us a kind of devotion or love which is more interested in the good of others than what we might want to obtain for our individual selves. By identifying the kind of self-transcendence which should exist within the order of our human cognition, we create conditions for the kind of self-transcendence which should properly exist within the context and the drama of our individual, social human lives.