



Curriculum Theologiae

What is the Kind of Excellence We Aim at? Is it Achieved?

George Pattery

<https://doi.org/10.48604/ct.109>

Submitted on: 2013-12-18

Posted on: 2013-12-18

(YYYY-MM-DD)

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What is the kind of excellence we aim at? Is it achieved?

Prof. Dr. George Pattery, S.J.

1. Aiming at Excellence.

The kind of 'Excellence' that we aim at theological and philosophical institutes calls for a revision to my mind. More often than not, it has been interpreted in terms of 'achievement, performance, out-put, management' etc. All these are valid indicators to some extent. However, the excellence that we aim at is of a different 'category'; it entails a different way of perceiving and a different way of understanding. In the deepest sense of the word it is a religious perception – an ability to look at reality from the ultimate perspective (to borrow Tillich's phrase) or to be ultimately concerned. I do not mean here a dichotomous understanding of the 'sacred and secular'; rather 'excellence' entails an **integral perception** that enables one to see reality (people, events, science, culture and religions) in their totality, in their inter-connectedness, in their love-relationship. Excellence is a religio-epistemological category in our 'philosophical - theological' frame of reference.

Excellence for me is exemplified in the act and attitude of the Bishop of Rome in asking to be blessed by the people in the piazza of San Pietro. That is an 'excellent act', it is an excellent attitude, it has an excellent 'outcome'. It is an **excellent act** in which he let himself be taught. This act includes a presupposition that there is 'plenty-fullness' outside; there is abundance outside of oneself, and that one can be filled. This is an intelligent act that recognizes the giftedness of the other, the knowability of the other and the plenitude of the other. There is much to learn from and more to receive. Excellence is an academic act when 'plentifulness of reality' invades and impacts one and propels one to act, to search. It is an act that affirms the disclosure of reality that is continuous and on-going. It is an intelligent act of obeying the plenitude of love. An **excellent act** is a matter of choice or a perspective, with regard to everything.

Excellence is an **attitude** of '*semper di piu*', the more, the *magis*. The more of what? The more of humility and simplicity; the more of receptivity and respect to the totality; the more of surrender. This religious epistemology invites an attitude of 'depth' that one always seeks, one always receives, that one always expects. This is possible where there is simplicity, an ability to be open and a capacity to grasp the essential. It requires an emotional intelligence as well an

intuitive capacity to contemplate reality, to search, to discover and to rejoice with 'plenitude'. It is an attitude of 'dying and rising' that is hidden in the pedagogy of the wheat falling on the ground.

Excellence is **an outcome**. From an epistemological point of view, this outcome refers to an integral perspective. 'Excellence' in philosophical and theological institute offers an integral approach wherein different disciplines coalesce and contribute towards an integral perception of and relationship with reality. This summons 'wisdom' that enables one to relate with people with respect, to relate with nature with a sense of 'mystery and wonder', to relate with the Ultimate as the most intimate, to be concerned with the wounded, the afflicted and the excluded with empathy, to research with attention and awareness. In other words the outcome of the excellence is a compassionate 'mind and heart'. Excellence in 'philosophical and theological formation' yields an epistemology of compassion.

GS (Vat II) in no.15 refers to 'wisdom' that is expected of our intellectual formation. *"The intellectual nature of [man] finds at last its perfection, as it should, in wisdom which gently draws the human mind to look for and to love what is true and good. ...our age, more than many of the past, needs such wisdom if all that [man] discovers is to be ennobled through human effort. Indeed the future of the world is in danger unless provision is made for [men] of greater wisdom. It should also be pointed out that many nations, poorer as far as material goods are concerned yet richer as regards wisdom, can be of great advantage to others."*

A **com-passionate** mind and heart could be considered as the outcome of 'excellence'.

2. How is it achieved?

In a sense it is a daunting task to 'quantify excellence'. Perhaps we shall attempt at pointing out 'how' it is aimed at, rather than how it is achieved, with a couple of examples.

1.An Inter-disciplinary approach.

In teaching a systematic topic in theology for example, a biblical teacher is invited to present the biblical perspectives on the topic and elicit a discussion. Similarly an Indian philosophy teacher is invited to discuss the same issue from Indian traditions. A sociology teacher would look at the sociological implications of the issue and a pastoral guide would raise issues related to the ministry. All the while the systematic teacher interacts on these perspectives and enables students to acquire an 'integral perspective' to the topic.

2. Faith-Journey sharing

As part of the Golden Jubilee of Vat II (The Year of Faith), the senior faculty was invited to share their 'faith-journey' – the stepping-stones, the struggles and movement of their journey. This was indeed a very challenging and affirming experience for many. An event that was significant, a book that challenged, a person that inspired – these were part and parcel of a journey wherein a tapestry of faith was woven; each of the narratives looked so different yet so attractive. It was intellectually stimulating and personally challenging experience.

3. Research/Class Presentations.

At the Masters'/Doctoral Levels, students take turns to present their research work and invite discussions. This has proved to be an effective way of supporting one another's' research and to learn from each other. A similar exercise is done at the lower level, when students in different groups present their group discussion or group study matter using audio-visual means. Rather than a 'performance', these need to be guided to be an exercise in 'depth' and in collaboration.

4. E-world and Excellence.

To some extent, excellence in academic sphere is being determined by E-world. To respond to this, JDV has introduced Audio-visual facility, Library access, Digital Library facility etc in the campus for students and staff.

It brings its own challenges, especially to avoid 'cut and paste' strategies, plagiarism, living virtual world etc. Struggling to cope with it.

In conclusion one could say that 'excellence' is a religious quality, a perspective that one takes with regard to the world, in the way one engages the world. It implies on the one hand to take this world seriously with all its scientific, philosophical and theological achievements, and its evolutionary journey; on the other hand it calls for a disciplined approach to the world to discover the paschal dimension of everything. One needs to be a 'mystic and prophetic' at the same time.

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth,
Pune - India