

and members. To wish to retain the label Catholic while rejecting minimal acknowledgment of acceptance of the Catholic faith is absurd. But this is the absurdity Fathers Malloy and Monan, in the name of their universities, have adopted.

This sad article is only the latest event in a drama that has been unfolding in the Church since 1968. What is at issue is not the research and teaching of the majority of the faculty, but the dissenting status of the theologians. Economists do not chafe under the yoke of faith; political scientists do not bemoan the impending threat of the

Inquisition. It is the theologians who have led Catholic universities down the path to effective apostasy.

Reverend and dear Fathers, please stop embarrassing yourselves and your institutions. Drop the incoherent arguments. Spare us these pious invocations of an academic freedom that amounts to an attack on the principle of contradiction. It is impossible to be Catholic and not Catholic at the same time. That fundamental logic principle used to be understood in Catholic institutions. ✠

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## Catholic Theology at the Threshold of the Third Millennium

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### A SHORT HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

It is a considerable task to deal in one lecture with the present state of theology. Because of the short time available I can only mention the more important issues of our theme. Let me begin by recalling that the Christian Doctors borrowed **the term theology** from Greek philosophy and began to use it to denote the true doctrine about God, while St. Thomas Aquinas prefers the expression sacred *doctrine*, he also uses the word theology. Sacred theology, as distinguished from philosophical or natural theology, means the science which studies the revealed faith, reduces what is revealed into a certain order and tries to understand it. St. Thomas assigns a three-fold task to theology: (1) its preparatory role is to demonstrate the preambles of the Christian faith (such as the existence of God); (2) it explains the mysteries of the faith by means of certain analogies; (3) it refutes attacks against the faith.<sup>1</sup>

**The problem** with the science of theology is that **it cannot start from basic evident**

**knowledge**, as do the profane sciences when they use axioms and first principles. The reason is that is object, sc. the mysteries of the Faith, surpasses human understanding. Divine revelation sets this object before theology, which borrows, so to say, its basic principles, sc. the Articles of the Faith, from God and so it rests upon divine science. In this way theologians begin their task by listening to and meditating upon what God has revealed in so far as this message is proposed by the Church. As we shall see, this creates a special relationship of theology with the Magisterium of the Church. Theology is born out of our human efforts to understand, in so far as possible, what God has revealed. Indeed, our mind seeks truth and understanding. As St. Anselm said, "I believe in order to understand."<sup>2</sup>

The **subject matter** of theology is God himself. Anything else besides God, such as redemption, the resurrection, the role of Mary, eschatology, is studied in so far as it is related to God's plan to save mankind and let man share in divine life. For instance, theology considers God creating the world, God saving man, God the reward of man. Very strikingly, in our liturgical prayers, we recognize this, since we always say

"God who..." (*Deus qui...*), sc. created us, sent your Son to our rescue, etc.

As is the case with philosophy, theology is divided into several branches, sc. **positive theology** which brings together and studies the sources of theology, sc. Holy Scripture and the Fathers as well as the doctrinal decisions of the councils and popes, of which it investigate the background and range. Related to positive theology is historical theology which, as its name indicates, considers the various parts of the doctrine of the faith as they were known and expressed in the course of the centuries. Thus we have the history of dogma, the history of moral theology, the history of spirituality.

**Theology proper** studies the doctrine of the faith. In the days of Aquinas, it was considered to be a single discipline but nowadays we usually distinguish between biblical theology, dogmatic theology, moral theology, and ascetico-mystic theology. This division into branches does have advantages, but it risks separating moral theology from its sources and dogmatic theology from Holy Scripture. Therefore, the Vatican Council insisted on making Holy Scripture again the center of all theological speculation, as it was in the days of St. Thomas. It is particularly important in the study of moral theology to bring out its connection with the dogmas of the Christian faith.

This has taken us to **the history of theology**. In the primitive Church there were already "doctores" and teachers. The use of these words indicates that passing on revealed truth was considered the communication of knowledge. The Christian authors of the first two centuries had to explain and defend the faith to the non-Christians of their time. The Fathers of the Church presented profound reflections on the doctrine of the faith, but did not elaborate systematic treatises. Pastoral instruction was foremost in their work. Theological studies developed very much in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as theologians acquired a better knowledge of the sources of the sacred doctrine and began to use scientific methods, for instance by placing the dogmas in a systematic order. Several schools of theology came into existence,

such as the Franciscan School, dependent on certain doctrines of Augustine as well as on a set of theses of Avicenna and Avicbron. St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, used the best philosophical insights of Aristotle and Neo-Platonism to develop a most impressive theology. After his death, the Dominicans began to form the Thomist School. Later on, variants appeared such as nominalism and the theology of the Jesuit order which tended to follow a somewhat eclectic Thomism.

These forms of theology were acknowledged as legitimate by the Church. Despite differences, there was a good measure of **uniformity**. Between the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council, a great number of manuals in theology were published quite similar in method and content. Leo XIII attempted to bring about greater depth and scientific consistency in theological studies as well as closeness to the mind of the Church by **urging to accept St. Thomas' theology**. Out of the same concern Vatican II declared that theology must be practiced by Catholics choosing St. Thomas as their master.

However, centuries of scholastic theology has also some **shadow sides**: most manuals of theology were written in Latin, the form of the treatises was extremely terse and sober, using the canons of logic in its definitions, divisions, and arguments. In nineteenth century Germany a **reaction** set in. The cultural movement of romanticism, together with certain Protestant authors such as Schleiermacher, influenced professors of the recently founded faculty of Catholic theology in Tübingen. J.A. Möhler and his disciples taught a theology closer to life and modern language. However, the School of Tübingen was influenced by German philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The most important German theologian of the nineteenth century was M. Scheeben who presented profound studies of the mysteries of the faith, in which he combined the thought of the Church Fathers with the systematic studies of the scholastics, in particular of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the twentieth century this concern to create a more understandable and simpler theology was continued by Karl Adam who published some

widely read books on Christ and on the Church. Odo Casel's studies on the presence of Christ in liturgical celebrations (*Mysteriengegenwart*) also deserve to be mentioned. The way in which these authors present the doctrine of the faith is called kerygmatic theology. Hans Urs von Balthasar belongs to this trend in so far as he elaborated beautifully worded considerations on the ways in which God manifested himself (*theophany*).

In France the Jesuits H. de Lubac, J. Daniélou and H. Bouillard started a movement called *la nouvelle théologie*, which purported to leave behind the scholastic form of theology and to return to the way in which the Church Fathers used to explain the faith. Scholastic theology, they argued, leaves no room for history, since it states that reality exists in essences more than in subjects.<sup>4</sup> However, H. Bouillard went too far in that he argued that the concepts in which we express the faith have no objective value, a view which one finds back later in the theology of Schillebeeckx. What counts for Bouillard is the whole proposition, that is the movement of the intellect toward truth.<sup>5</sup> The destructive consequences of this theory, sc. dogmatic relativism, were pointed out by some French Dominicans. Bouillard's theory was rejected as erroneous in the encyclical *Humani generis* of Pius XII.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile the works of the German Jesuit Karl Rahner came into the limelight of publicity. His theology was influenced by German philosophy (Hegel and Heidegger) and by a current called Transcendental Thomism. His theological writings are decidedly anthropocentric.<sup>7</sup> Rahner made man's so-called self-transcendence the center of his theory. By self-transcending acts (as Rahner believed to be any authentic act of religion) man enters into the supernatural world. Because of the enormous influence his writings exercised, Rahner was responsible for the introduction of a new way of conducting theological studies as well as for the disappearance of scholastic theology in Germany. Somewhat later the German author Hans Küng attracted attention with his attacks on papal infallibility. The Flemish theologian Schillebeeckx, in-

fluenced by historicism and perspectivism, argued that most statements about the faith in the New Testament and in Tradition use concepts which are no longer valid for us since they belong to a different period in history. Starting from our personal experience of Christ we must use contemporary concepts and ways of thinking to express the meaning of the Gospel message.

The theological debate during the first two decades after Vatican II has been very lively. Theologians began to develop class consciousness (*esprit de corps*). Frequent conventions were held and new theological quarterlies such as *Concilium*, *Communio*, *Revue théologique de Louvain*, *Tijdschrift voor theologie* and *Forum Katholische Theologie* were founded. What is remarkable is that several theologians have become much more critical with regard to the Magisterium of the Church, resort to the use of different philosophies and contemporary ways of thinking and practice a continuous dialogue with modern thought. The result is that much of what nowadays is called theology is no longer a study of the contents of revelation in light of the Tradition and teaching of the Magisterium, but a personal meditation on certain texts of the Bible in the light of contemporary ways of thinking. Certain of these writings hardly deserve to be called Catholic, when one compares their contents to what theology should be.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the abandoning of the scholastic method has not improved precise verbal expression and argumentation in a number of publications. In the theological literature of the last 30 years one comes across slogans such as: Truth cannot be shut up in concepts belonging to the past. Man lives in history of which the successive moments are heterogeneous, so that tradition loses its value. Truth is a task we have to carry out each time anew.

This opinion is applied to the writings of the New Testament. It holds that many of its texts are characterized by the ways of thinking of their historical milieu and reflect only indirectly what Jesus taught. Therefore, many statements of the New Testament depend on the anthropological and sociological situation of the first century A.D.



Some authors go beyond that position and claim that accepting doctrines from authority is irrational. In the name of freedom of thought theologians should not beforehand consent to Christian doctrines as proposed by the bishops and the pope.<sup>9</sup>

## THEOLOGY AND THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH

As we have seen above, theology depends on the teaching of the Church to which the divine revelation has been entrusted and which is the norm of its interpretation. On the other hand, it is a fact that the Magisterium regularly requests theologians to help determine and formulate the doctrine of the faith. So the question of the precise relationship between both arises. This question has acquired a great actuality because of the clashes between groups of theologians or individual authors and the Magisterium of the Church.

Theologians share with the Magisterium the task to understand ever better and to expound revealed truth, but their functions are different. Theology aims more immediately at the intellectual understanding of the Word of God and its expression in language, while the Magisterium is in the first place concerned with the preservation, definitive evaluation and authoritative transmission of revealed truth. Furthermore, the responsibility of theologians toward the People of God will often be mediate, in so far as much of their work is done at the request of the Magisterium. If, on the other hand, theologians address themselves directly to the Christian people, they need delegation by the Magisterium.<sup>10</sup>

In an important document,<sup>11</sup> devoted to this issue, the International Theological Commission stresses that both the Magisterium and the theologians are subject to the Word of God, but that the relationship of the Magisterium with revealed doctrine is unique, for it is the privileged subject of Tradition which, as Vatican II declares,<sup>12</sup> cannot be separated from its contents. Theologians share the pastoral task of the bishops in that they must

take into account the interests of the People of God and must give proof of prudence and reverent obedience to the Magisterium. This is particularly important today because the media like to spread non-conformist views of some theologians and so create confusion among the faithful. Since the exercise of theology has to a large extent become public, this pastoral responsibility of theologians is now greater than in the past.

Theologians assist the Magisterium in its task of teaching and watching over the doctrine of the faith. On the other hand, they study the ideas prevalent in contemporary society and propose solutions of problems. In a sense they mediate between the Magisterium and the People of God, but theologians are not a sort to channel through which the teaching of the bishops would reach the faithful.

The authority of theologians is derived from their faithfulness to divine revelation, accompanied by a life according to the faith. Scientific competence is twofold: A first, more technical specialization confers a "human authority," such as, e.g., by the historico-critical study of the sources. A second competence flows from faithful attention to and prayerful meditation on the Word of God. This competence is supported by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To spread publicly their insights and conclusions theologians need the authorization of the Magisterium.

A much debated question is that of the "freedom" of theologians in the exercise of their function, that is, of not being subject to outside pressure. In the past there have been many complaints of theologians who felt unjustly treated by their bishop or by the Vatican authorities. The Magisterium must indeed defend the integrity of revealed truth and protect the faith of the People of God. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Doctrinal Commissions of the Episcopal Conferences must carry out this task. The *Ratio agendi* of the Congregation, as it is now, goes to extremes of fairness toward individual theologians suspected of error, so that disciplinary measures against these theologians are difficult to

take and errors often continue to be diffused without much opposition.

To solve difficulties a dialogue between representatives of the Magisterium and theologians suspected of heterodox views may be helpful. However, experience shows<sup>13</sup> that such a dialogue is often fruitless because of stubbornness or pride on the side of the theologians. If so, a doctrinal procedure against those who deviate from the faith may become inevitable.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY WITH PHILOSOPHY

**D**ivine Revelation has been expressed in human concepts and entrusted to the human mind. Because of the enormous variety of ways of thinking, personal experiences and judgments of value of individual Christians, the doctrine of the faith will be quite vulnerable. Hence St. Paul warns us: "Make sure that no one traps you and deprives you of your freedom by some secondhand, empty, rationalistic philosophy, based on the principles of this world instead of on Christ."<sup>14</sup> History mentions several cases where pagan philosophical thinking distorted the expression of the faith. Hippolytus of Rome observed that the Gnostic Valentianus found his inspiration in the Pythagorean theory of numbers and Plato's dialogues. Basilides borrowed certain ideas from Aristotle as Marcion did from Empedocles.<sup>15</sup> Certain Christians resorted to the scheme of emanation of hypostases or first principles, as taught in the Middle and Neo-Platonism, to express the three divine Persons. Despite its intrinsic value (e.g. its stand against atheism, the affirmation of divine providence and of the immateriality of the soul, the view that we must imitate God), Platonism suffered from serious defects: a tendency toward monism, divinization of the cosmos, disrespect of the body and the material world. Those Protestant authors who speak of a hellenization of Christianity are mistaken. The *ὁμοούσιον* (consubstantial) of the Nicene Creed constitutes an

impassable obstacle between Neo-Platonism and the Christian faith.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Epiphanius writes that it is the tactic of the Arians to speak about the divine persons in terms of the syllogistic of Aristotle in order to declare that Christ cannot be born from the Father.<sup>17</sup> Nestorianism is an attempt to express the faith with purely human means.<sup>18</sup> The dependence of monophysist heretics on Platonism is even more evident. Following Platonic ideas certain Christian doctors asserted that the human nature of Christ is absorbed by his divinity, as a drop of water is in the sea.<sup>19</sup> Stoic philosophy influenced Pelagius. Thus it is not surprising to hear Tertullian say that pagan philosophers are the supermarket where heretics find their ideas.<sup>20</sup>

Also in later ages non-Christian philosophies continued to exercise a considerable influence on a number of theologians. Suffice it to recall the influence of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and existentialism as well as of ideologies such as historicism and Marxism. However, this rather negative presentation of the corrosive influence of philosophical thought on the expression of the faith must not give us a wrong idea. Philosophical thought is an indispensable aid to theology. In the ancient Church the first Christian authors as well as Fathers of the Church made constant use of philosophical concepts and arguments. They recognized that pagan philosophers sometimes express the truth and explained this by the illumination of the Divine Logos, called the *Λόγος σπερματικός*.<sup>21</sup> In this way they express the idea of the unity of all knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Those Christians who say that they do not need philosophy and only seek the naked faith are like vine growers who neglect their vineery, but want to reap instantly the grapes. They need tools, as physicians also do.<sup>23</sup> Thus we see that Platonism accompanied Christian thought from the early beginnings until modern times. I have already mentioned some of its intellectual treasures. However, the Christian theologians corrected or rejected certain Platonic theories such as the pre-existence of the soul and the dualistic theory of man. Nevertheless, through St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius the influence of a

Platonism accommodated to Christianity has been considerable in the Middle Ages and beyond.

In St. Thomas' day Aristotle's philosophy began to be used in order to give theology a scientific status and to arrange the various themes in a logical order. Aquinas himself wanted to treat the themes and their causal connection from the point of view of divine science.<sup>24</sup> In his works he defends the right of the theologian to use philosophical considerations in elaborating sacred doctrine, even if he frequently warns against possible dangers.<sup>25</sup> In his Letter to the Galatians 3:15, Paul uses an argument based on social and juridical practice to prove that the Sinai Law did not cancel God's earlier promise made to Abraham. Aquinas comments that this shows that we may use any argument taken from the sciences to explain and defend the doctrine of the faith.<sup>26</sup>

St. Thomas' fundamental principle is that there can be no contradiction between what (true) philosophy says and revealed dogma, since both are gifts of God.<sup>27</sup> If philosophers make statements contrary to the faith, we have no longer to do with philosophy but with its abuse.<sup>28</sup> St. Thomas could use much of Aristotle's philosophy because he felt that Aristotle faithfully rendered things as they are and tried to stay close to what is evident.<sup>29</sup> He is convinced that most of philosophy is ordained to the knowledge of God.<sup>30</sup> There is a set of natural insights which reason can demonstrate and which serve as a preparation to the faith.<sup>31</sup> Even if the light of natural reason is imperfect, it nevertheless contains some truth and proposes some analogies with the dogmas of the faith. However, when borrowing philosophical insights the theologian must be careful not to use theories which are contrary to the faith. In the second place, he must never submit the doctrine of the faith to philosophical criteria. Rather theology judges the different philosophies. Finally, the role of philosophy in theology is secondary. Those who use philosophy in theology do not add water to the wine of faith, but transform the water of philosophy into the wine of the sacred doctrine. In the same article Aquinas describes the triple role of

philosophy in theology: it demonstrates the preambles of the faith such as the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul; it helps explain the faith by means of certain analogies taken from the created order. To give some examples of what is meant, we refer to the analogies to explain the eternal generation of the Word, the procession of the Holy Spirit, the order of grace and the sacraments and the infused virtues, etc. Finally, philosophy helps to refute attacks against the faith.<sup>32</sup>

Theologians move within the limits set by dogmatical definitions and the ordinary magisterium of the Church. The contribution of philosophical thought to their theological work will be modest, although real. One may point to the study of the role of women and above all to developments in moral theology.

As is obvious not any philosophy can be used in theology. Some years after Vatican II Karl Rahner suggested that from now on theologians would speak in different languages, meaning that they will use different philosophies.<sup>33</sup> The argument he advances is not new: St. Thomas has incorporated Aristotelianism, in a similar way we must incorporate certain philosophies of our time. However, the issue is not so simple. Aquinas did not "incorporate" Aristotle, but used what he considered to be the true philosophy based on evident principles, correct analyses and stringent arguments. If part of Aristotle's philosophy can be used in theology, it is because it expresses a truth. There is no conflict between the doctrine of the faith and a philosophy as long as the latter states the truth present in things (*veritatis rerum*) of which God is the author. In other words, in order to become a tool in theology a philosophy must express the truth of the order of creation.

The major philosophies certainly possess some truth, but they are quite frequently more or less subjective constructions. This happens more easily in our own age, in which subjectivism has become dominant. Thus Paul VI points out that the modern philosophies to which theologians nowadays turn for help are often irreconcilable with the



faith.<sup>34</sup> With regard to the comparison with St. Thomas' use of Aristotelianism,<sup>35</sup> the Pope observes that modern philosophies are such totally different ways of thinking that they cannot be placed on the same level with Aristotelianism.<sup>36</sup> In the same vein, John Paul II declared, in an address to the Gregorian University, that in theology one cannot resort to just any philosophy. There are philosophies which by the overall orientation of their thought or by the further development of their theories are not qualified for collaboration with theology.<sup>37</sup> The Pope even said that when theology uses them, it condemns itself to death.<sup>38</sup> If these philosophies are not qualified for their use in theology, they may nevertheless help the theologian from the outside by suggesting certain paths for research or by obliging him to clarify difficult points.

### THEOLOGY FACING HISTORICISM AND HERMENEUTICS

**H**uman life has a historical dimension. We constantly apply the categories of progress and development. The growth of the natural science in the 18th and 19th centuries was accompanied by the apparition of the ideology of the indefinite perfectibility of man and progress in knowledge and well-being. Hegel introduced the theory of truth as a continuous process of becoming: the human mind stands in a dialectical relationship with things. In the course of history philosophy and religion express the stages of the life of the spirit. While Karl Marx understood historical progress in a materialistic way, Wilhelm Dilthey asserted that religion and philosophy (the *Geisteswissenschaften*) develop thanks to the dominant spirit of a period of history.<sup>39</sup> Others speak of a dependence on society instead of history. Society exercises a pressure from which few people escape (E. Durkheim, K. Mannheim and P.A. Sorokin). Durkheim believed that each social group secretes its collective representations and rules of conduct from which religion and morals originate. Karl Mannheim tells us that values are not eternal truth descended from

heaven, but are part of the process of history.<sup>40</sup> Values are rooted in the condition of society. This so-called historicism holds that truth must be judged with reference to the time in which it is formulated. Dilthey professes his faith as follows: "The immeasurable and unfathomable universe mirrors itself palpably in founders of religion, in poets and philosophers. These all stand under the influence of time and space. Every world view is conditioned historically and therefore limited and relative." He sees this as an advantage. However, Dilthey was obliged to make an exception for the sciences which do reach definite true positions.

Historicism exercises a considerable influence on some theologians. The perhaps best known case is E. Schillebeeckx's theology which declares that most formulas of the faith and even doctrinal statements in the Gospels and the letters of St. Paul depend for their expression on the categories of thought of their cultural environment. They contain a core of truth which has permanent value, but this core is difficult to define. An almost total relativism results. Here are two examples to illustrate the theory. (a) The various statements in the New Testament and the dogmas about Jesus Christ boil down to only one message: Jesus is the definite prophet or messenger coming to us from God. This conviction was expressed in images borrowed from the cultural environment, such as "the divine man," "the personified wisdom," etc. (b) When Jesus says that a valid marriage cannot be dissolved, he has in mind marriage as practiced in his time in Palestine. However, nowadays a marriage is a free union of two partners based on love. If there is no love anymore, there is no marriage and nothing left to dissolve.

There is no denying that, as historicism says, our views are easily influenced by our historical situation and that what most people think does depend on the time in which they live and the culture they share. But the human intellect is not immersed in history. Man can lift himself above the floating instants of his life and grasp the permanent essence of things. The very fact that Dilthey makes a universal statement on the historicity of

our mind contradicts his historicist position. Historicism destroys the very possibility of scientific work and philosophy. Theologically speaking the position of Schillebeeckx and those who follow him has been condemned by Vatican I. This Council said that there is a definite sense of the dogmas which must be believed.<sup>41</sup> The formulas of the faith express concepts not tied to a certain form of human culture, or to a particular theological school. The concepts used in dogmatic statements present that part of reality which common experience allows the human mind to grasp. Therefore, these formulas are understandable and valid for men of all times and all places.<sup>42</sup> It is true that the expressive power of certain words may change in the course of time and that dogmatic truths may first receive a less perfect expression and are stated more explicitly later on. But the dogmatic formulas of the Church's Magisterium were from the very beginning suitable for communicating revealed truth and remain for ever suitable to those who interpret them correctly.<sup>43</sup>

The danger of a relativistic interpretation of the dogmas and the moral teaching of the Church is very real. In countless documents the Holy Father has warned against this danger. A good example is the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* of 1993. In his recent apostolic letter *Ad tuendam fidem* of June 30, 1998 the Pope, opposing the relativism of several theologians, reminds us that every Catholic must accept the doctrines of faith and morals which the Church has proposed in a definite way. The letter cites several examples such as the doctrine that women cannot be candidates for ordination to the priesthood. Theologians who, appealing to the right to free opinion and research, continue to teach the opposite automatically exclude themselves from the Church.

We must now deal with a second challenge to contemporary theology, sc. the **hermeneutical** method. According to W. Pannenberg present-day theology stands under the sign of hermeneutics.<sup>44</sup> The term hermeneutics has several meanings. Originally it signified the interpretation of literary texts and, for Christians, the interpretation of the

Bible.<sup>45</sup> A central issue is the allegorical interpretation of otherwise difficult texts, such as the passages of the Old Testament on the extermination of certain nations by Israel. The German Lutheran author Schleiermacher wanted to develop hermeneutics as a general theory of interpretation. He followed Hegel who taught that our concepts are the manifestation of the absolute spirit in a particular period of history. We must try to understand what ancient texts mean for us, instead of looking for a hidden objective meaning.

The most important book on hermeneutics is H.G. Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer starts from the assumption that our philosophy or theology cannot be a direct continuation of those of previous centuries, since our relation to the concepts expressed in the latter has changed. The problem is how to understand the past in our present situation. We must not try to reconstruct the past as it was in its original situation but seek to "understand" it. This "understanding" becomes possible on the basis of congeniality.<sup>46</sup> Using Heidegger's terminology he says that this "congenial understanding" belongs to our human manner of being (*Dasein*). Thanks to this attempt to understand the past as well as persons and events of our time we also come to know ourselves. This means that Gadamer remains in a phenomenological perspective. Reality never shows itself as it is but lets us see perspectives which depend on the subjectivity of the observer. History and tradition present a succession of perspectives. In this way they are a *Wirkungsgeschichte*.<sup>47</sup> Our understanding changes, broadens in the course of time.<sup>48</sup> Gadamer sees knowledge as a process of reproduction by means of sympathy but his phenomenology excludes a really objective knowledge of the structure of things and so it makes the metaphysics of being impossible. He even speaks of "the naive objectivism of the sciences." It is impossible to accept Gadamer's view on this point. We must defend the possibility of an objective knowledge of reality, sc. of the *veritas rerum* as St. Thomas says.

Gadamer assigns an important role to tradition. As he likes to say, time brings truth with it.



However, even if it is true that divine revelation took place in history, its contents cannot be reduced to a product of history. The Church believes that divine revelation has been given at precise moments in history and has proposed a doctrine. Revelation teaches us objective and definite truths, even if the Church, at this moment of her pilgrimage through time, may not yet have understood the full contents of what has been revealed. We must insist on the definite, absolute truth of the faith and the meaning of Jesus Christ. Hermeneutics may help us understand better Holy Scripture in that it makes us pay attention to the different literary forms in which it has been transmitted to us. Hermeneutics also suggests that the historico-critical method is not enough to understand the message of Holy Scripture. We must read the Bible in communion with the Fathers and with the entire tradition. As St. Augustine said, the Bible must be read *in fide catholica*.<sup>49</sup> Awareness of the need for such an encompassing exegesis is one of the benefits of the hermeneutical movement.<sup>50</sup> Finally, hermeneutics can also help the Church when she communicates the doctrine of the faith and the biblical message to people living in different cultural circumstances. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the Church in her contact with changing historical situations and cultural environments may stress different aspects of the treasure of the faith, without ever abandoning what it has recognized as revealed doctrine. In this way and with these restrictions hermeneutics can be of some help to theological studies.<sup>51</sup>

## THE PRESENT TASK OF THEOLOGIAN

As our remarks on hermeneutics have shown, theologians cannot just limit themselves to the study of the sources of the doctrine of the faith; they must also take into consideration the questions addressed to them by the world and bring out better the relation of the dogmas of the faith with our daily lives and concerns.<sup>52</sup> While opposing the

horizontalism of modern man they must show who is Christ.

Impressed by the apparent opposition between the modern world and contemporary ways of thinking some theologians favor a shift from doctrine to praxis: what some Christians or a particular group do and believe would be a source for developments in theology. In this way some consider the way in which progressive Indian priests use texts from the Upanishads in the liturgy as a proof that there also is some sort of divine revelation in these sacred texts of Hinduism. It is certainly true that the praxis of the Christian people may often be an indication for the faith. The ancient saying runs, "the rule of praying is the rule of believing." Yet one cannot apply this to locally circumscribed communities. Else the Arian and Nestorian communities of the past would also have been a source of theology. Praxis must always be guided by submission to the Magisterium and Tradition. While the German poet Goethe places praxis at the beginning ("*Am Anfang war die Tat*") we, Christians, say that the Word of God was in the beginning.<sup>53</sup>

Turning now to the question of the main issues in present-day theology one gets a good idea by consulting the work of the International Theological Commission during the past 20 years.<sup>54</sup> A central theme is Christology, and in particular: the genuine meaning of the terms "person" and "nature" in the dogmatic definitions; the human consciousness of Jesus and his vision of God; Jesus and the institution of the Eucharist and the founding of the Church; the Resurrection. In addition to Christology the theology of the Holy Spirit has become a very prominent subject, in particular the themes of the renewal of Christianity through the gift of the Holy Spirit and of the Law of the New Testament as the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Divine revelation and the inspiration of Holy Scripture are also subject matters of great importance. A first question is to what extent revelation is the communication of knowledge and of a particular doctrine, and to what extent human experience and human categories play a role. A related

question is how the substance of divine revelation is preserved by the tradition of the Church.

In an interview he granted some years ago Cardinal Ratzinger said that when he would have more leisure after having been relieved of his task as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith he would like to devote his time to the study of the dogma of original sin. Without this central dogma, redemption of mankind through the death and resurrection of Christ becomes unintelligible. However, the dogma is baffling for our understanding in so far as our sense of guilt and sin has dimmed and present-day individualism makes it difficult to understand how through the fault of Adam we are all born in a state of sin. On the other hand, it is obvious that there is something basically wrong with mankind, since vices and crime, cruelty and wars, greed and selfishness are widespread.

Another series of problems concern the relationship of faith and culture, inculturation, the role of non-Christian religions, which we must consider in the next lecture. In addition to this there is the problem of whether an African, an Indian, a Chinese and a Japanese theology are possible. The answer to this problem is complex. Theology is essentially the study, analysis and ordering of revealed truth. In his work the theologian uses the insights of reason and true philosophical principles. The question about the possibility of an African and Asian theology amounts to a question about the recourse to African, Indian, Chinese thought in elaborating revealed truth. The answer to it is contained in the previous section on the relation between theology and philosophy. Insofar as African or Oriental thought expresses the truth of things as created by God (*veritas rerum*) they can, of course, be used, but with a *proviso*. Theology is a science and as such it is situated on the level of general considerations. It abstracts from individual feelings and poetic descriptions. The insights of natural reason and the terminology used by the Church Fathers and later theologians are excellent

tools to develop theology. Trying to replace them by less universal, less scientific or only partially true philosophies would bring down theology to a lower status and carry with it the danger of divisions and deviations in the faith. One could also say that in doctrinal development of Christian thought there is continued enrichment and growth, but no abandonment or rejection of the past theological tradition. Asian or African ways of studying the faith must complement, but not replace traditional theology.

However, Christians in Africa, Asia and America may well contribute to a further elaboration of theology in the light of the values of truth contained in their national cultures. Finally, in the transmission of Christian doctrine they are asked to carry the treasure of revealed doctrine to their people in terms which can be more easily understood.

Another important topic in contemporary theology is ecumenical studies. To mention only a few points of actuality: the question of the *Filioque* added in the Latin West to the Creed of Nicea and not accepted by the Orthodox Church; the primacy of Peter; the place of Mary in the economy of salvation; Holy Scripture and Tradition; justification; the Eucharist; the sacrament of the priesthood and the place of women in the Church; eschatology.

Finally there are many important issues in moral theology. A first question, already dealt with by the International Theological Commission, is that of the absolute validity of New Testament statements of our moral duties. Furthermore, the themes of natural law, of autonomy and heteronomy, of the criteria of morality, the relation of the judgment of conscience to the moral law, and, finally, the study of the moral virtues remain frequently discussed themes.

This survey may have given you an idea of the enormous task placed before theologians and of the importance of their work for the good of the People of God. ☩

1. *Expositio in Boetii De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4.
2. *Proslogion* 1, : PL 158, 227BC "Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam."
3. On theology in Germany in the nineteenth century see B. Welte, "Auf der Spur des Ewigen" in *Theologie in Aufbruch und Widerstreit*, Bremen 1965.
4. J. Daniélou in *Etudes*, April 1946, 14. What De Lubac and Daniélou were thinking apparently was theology according to Suarez and his disciples, as taught in those days at the scholasticates of the Society of Jesus. Unfortunately they were not very well acquainted with St. Thomas.
5. *Conversion et grâce chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris 1944.
6. Cf. *Humanae generis* § 14: "Some want to reduce to a minimum the meaning of dogmas and to free dogma from its terminology... They cherish the hope that when dogma is stripped of the elements which they hold to be extrinsic to divine revelation, it will become more attractive." §15: "As they say, dogma can be expressed also by the concepts of modern philosophy, whether of immanentism, idealism or existentialism or any other system. Some who are even more audacious affirm that this can and must be done, because they hold that the mysteries of faith are never expressed by truly adequate concepts, but only by approximate and ever changeable notions, in which the truth is to some extent expressed but necessarily distorted."
7. His two books *Geist in Welt* and *Hörer des Wortes* deal with man's relationship with God.
8. One may think here of so-called feminist theology, agogic theology, liberation theology. In the apostolic letter *Ad tuendam fidem* (1998) the Pope declared that those theologians who do not accept the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church are not Catholic theologians.
9. Cf. H. Albert, *Traktat über die kritische Vernunft*, Tübingen 1969, 96.
10. One must recall here the distinction, stressed by St. Thomas, S. Th. II-II 177, 2, between public instruction and private teaching. Public instruction can only be given under the authority of the leaders to which the Christian community has been committed. The *Imprimatur* from the bishop for books on the faith and the official appointment of lecturers in Catholic theology are forms of this delegation.
11. *Theses on the Mutual Relationship of the Magisterium of the Church and Theology*. See Ph. Delhaye in *La Documentation Catholique*, July 18, 1976.
12. *Dei Verbum*.
13. For instance, the dialogue between Augustine and the Donatists, that between Luther and Cajetan & John Eck and the discussions between Roman theologians and delegates of the editors of the *New Dutch Catechism* at Lake Garda.
14. *Colossians* 2:8.
15. *Refutatio* I, introd.: PG 16, 3017.
16. Cf. H. Dörrie, in Heinrich Dörrie et alii, *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, Leiden 1976, 37.
17. *Adversus haereses*, PG 42, 338C.
18. In accordance with what Aristotle writes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b32: "ἀνθρωπίνῳ φρονεῖν."
19. Theodoretus, *Eranistes*: PG 83, 153 D. See E. Von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter*, Einseideln 1964.
20. *De anima* 23, 5: "Doleo bona fide Platonem omnium haëreticorum condimentarium factum."
21. Clement of Alexandria, *Apol.* II 13, 3.
22. H. Chadwick, in *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, p. 163.
23. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* I, 9.
24. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 8.
25. Cf. S. Th. IIa-IIae 167, 1 ad. 3.
26. In *Galatos* c. 3, lectio 6: "Ex quo quidem habemus argumentum quod ad conferendum de his quae sunt fidei, possumus uti quacumque veritate cuiuscumque scientiae."
27. *Expositio in Boetii De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3.
28. *L.c.*: "...hoc non est philosophiae, sed magis philosophiae abusus ex defectu rationis. Et ideo possibile est ex principiis philosophiae huiusmodi errorem refellere."
29. *Q. d. de spirit. creaturis*, a. 3: "(proprium philosophiae Aristotelis) procedere ex rebus sensibilibus"; a. 5: "a manifestis non discedere."
30. In *I Sent.*, d. 0, q. 1, a. 1.
31. In *III Sent.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 3 C: "fidei subternitur naturalis cognitio."
32. *Expositio in Boetii De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3. See also S.c.G. I, c. 8.
33. See his "Über künftige Wege der Theologie" and "Zum heutigen Verhältnis von Philosophie und Theologie," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, X, 41-69 and 70-88.
34. *Lumen Ecclesiae*, § 3.
35. This would justify contemporary theologians when they resort to existentialism, Marxism, analytical philosophy and so on.
36. *L.c.*, § 29.
37. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II (1979), 2, 1416ff.
38. *O.c.*, 1177 ff. See also *ibid.*, p. 995 f.
39. *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt*, 1910.
40. See his *Wissenssoziologie*.
41. *Const. dogm. de Fide*, DS 3020; DS 3043.
42. *Encycl. Mysterium Fidei*.
43. *Declaratio Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 5 (*Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1973, 396 ff.)
44. *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Göttingen 1971, 123.
45. St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* is a manual on how to read the Scriptures.
46. "Hermeneutik," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, III p. 1061-1073.
47. By this term is meant that, in order to understand the full contexts of certain texts, we must take into consideration the impact of these texts on people in the course of time.
48. *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 225.
49. *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, c. 37, § 70.
50. It is now more and more admitted that critical exegesis alone is totally insufficient to understand the full sense of biblical texts.
51. See K. Lehmann, "Hermeneutik" in *Herders Theologisches Taschenlexikon*, 3, 286.
52. See Y. Congar, *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie*, Paris 1967, 57ff.
53. On praxis as a source of theology see J. Audinet et alii, *Le déplacement de la théologie*, Paris 1977, 83-143.
54. See the volume *International Theological Commission. Texts and Documents 1969-1985*. San Francisco (Ignatius Press) 1989.
55. Some authors object to the *scholastic* form of traditional manuals of theology. However, this form is concomitant with the scientific and objective character of theological studies. For the trained mind it holds many advantages.