

# INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY



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# Contents

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1. Concept of Theology: An Overlook? .....	5
2. Definitions of Christian Theology .....	15
3. Theology and other Sciences .....	29
4. Goals of the Theologizing.....	37
5. Foundations and Sources of Theology .....	41
6. Characteristics of Theology .....	68
7. Branches of Theology .....	71
8. History of Christian Theology .....	75
9. Important Mordern Day Theologians .....	91
10. Theologizing in the Indian Context .....	105
General Conclusion .....	119

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## Chapter 1

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# Concept of Theology: An Overlook?

### Introduction

Knowledge without devotion is futile. Devotion without knowledge is irrational. But true knowledge of God includes understanding everything from His perspective and that is vivid, personal and worthy. Theology is an art of learning to think God's thoughts after him. It is to learn what God loves and hates, and to see, hear, think, and act the way God wishes. Knowing how God thinks is the first step in becoming godly. Hebrews 5:11–6:3 teaches that deepening theological understanding equips one to be able to differentiate good from evil, and it exhorts believers to mature in their knowledge of God and His ways:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you

## Introduction to Theology

again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. (Hebrews 5:12–6:1).

In this introductory chapter the basic questions about God and his existence, the possibility of any God talk, and the nature of knowledge of God, the possibility of God experience and religious language etc. are briefly explained.

### **1.1. The God - Question**

Theology is generally understood as the discourse on God or God-talk. But in the present world of secularism, agnosticism and atheism, God's existence cannot be taken for granted. Does God exist? Even if God exists, can we know anything about God? Can we speak of God meaningfully as we speak about other subjects and objects?

### **1.2. The Existence of God**

On the existence of God there are normally three views: Theism, agnosticism and atheism within each of these views there are innumerable schools and divisions of opinions. Atheism is a position that rejects the existence of God. The term theism, first introduced by Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), derives from the Greek word *theos* meaning "god". It refers to any belief system that incorporates the existence of a deity. A deity is a supernatural being thought of as holy, divine or sacred. Theism refers to any kind of belief in any god or gods, so it is difficult to make any other generalizations about it. Two people may both say they believe in

God, so they're both theists; but what they mean by "God" could be completely different. Belief in God is also normally attached to other beliefs, such as belief in an afterlife or the soul. However, theism can also refer to religions with extremely different beliefs, such as reincarnation.

### A. Types of Theism

One can subdivide theism in many ways. For example, it can be divided into separate historical / cultural traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam (and each of these could be subdivided still further).

You can also define types of theism by number of God:

- **Monotheism:** one god
- **Polytheism:** many gods
- **Ditheism:** two gods, usually one good and one evil
- **Henotheism:** one main god with many minor gods

Alternatively, you can divide it in terms of different ideas about the *nature* of the god or gods:

- **Pantheism:** God = everything or the universe
- **Deism:** God created the whole universe but does not interfere in events
- **Autotheism:** God = the self or is within the self
- **Eutheism:** God is entirely merciful and just
- **Misotheism / Dystheism:** God is evil

### B. Quotes about Theism

#### Quote 1

- "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being." (Isaac Newton)

## Introduction to Theology

- Isaac Newton was a theist and one of the greatest scientists of all time. Newton's vision of the universe was extremely orderly and rational, like an elaborate and beautiful machine. His ideas gave rise to the view of God as a cosmic watchmaker who designed the universe and then left it alone to unwind according to its own laws.

### Quote 2

- “The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.” (Søren Kierkegaard)
- Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, and a Christian, who tried to argue philosophically for monotheism. He argued that faith alone was not a reason to believe in something, and tried to develop a more philosophically rigorous understanding of God and Christian practice. Part of his argument was that we should give up on the idea of asking God for help and instead take responsibility for our own lives and actions.

St. Thomas Aquinas gave five proofs for the existence of God. They are cosmological arguments, drawn from the cosmology of the time. From effects one is led to the cause and thus finally one arrives at the Ultimate Cause and the Prime Mover. These arguments may be helpful to those who believe, but to the non-believers these proofs seem to be not convincing. As Cardinal John Henry Newman had correctly pointed out, these proofs are abstract and philosophical and they can only provide a ‘convergence of diverse probabilities’. In principle, we can say that human person can come to the knowledge of God with the light of reason. “Our holy mother, the church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason (Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, no,2; Vatican



II, *Dei Verbum* no.6). Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God's revelation. Man has this capacity because he is created 'in the image of God' (Gen.1: 27)' (CCC. no.36).<sup>1</sup>

### **C. Theism vs. Atheism vs. Agnosticism**

The opposite of theism is atheism, or the belief that there are no gods. Atheism was once rare in the Western world, but it has grown rapidly over the past two centuries since traditional theistic beliefs and organized religions have been threatened both by science and by exposure to alternative belief systems from around the world. Atheists deny the existence of God, but often embrace other religious teachings, especially regarding morality and compassion; and atheists argue that true morality springs from reason and compassion rather than the will of God or the fear of disobeying God.

Although atheism is relatively new in the west, various atheistic belief systems have been popular in Asia for thousands of years. While some forms of Buddhism (from India) and Taoism (from China) are theistic, other forms have no gods, and can be considered atheistic. And Indian and Chinese atheism are very different from Western atheism in their rituals, traditions, and general philosophical outlook.

Agnosticism is quite different from either atheism or theism; it is not a belief, but rather an acknowledgement that we don't know whether gods exist or not; or at least the agnostic claims that he or she doesn't know! Most reasonable people are at least *a little* agnostic: some theists acknowledge that they don't know for a fact that God exists, even though they have faith; and some atheists, conversely, acknowledge that they can't be certain there is no God. However agnostics consider both theism and atheism to be irrationally based on faith.

### 1.3. Is God Talking Possible?

Even though God exists and we can know about his existence, can we speak about God meaningfully as he ineffable, infinite and inexhaustible? The classical Hindu tradition says that we can only say what God is not: *neti, neti*.<sup>2</sup> The mystical traditions and the classical Negative Theology too deny the possibility of positively speaking about God. But the biblical tradition and the mainline Christian tradition affirm that we can speak about God and we can have a positive understanding of God, though our knowledge of God is very limited. “Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about him is equally so. We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking. All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. The manifold perfections of creatures-their truth, their goodness, their beauty - all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking his creatures perfections as our starting point, ‘for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator’ (Wis. 13:5).

Human persons can have some knowledge of God, but their knowledge of God is limited. God is not an object to be experienced like other objects. Human persons cannot fully comprehend the Mystery of God as it transcends human capacities. As God is the source and destiny of the whole creation, there is a certain similarity, though very imperfect between the Creator and the created. It is by studying the created world and its qualities and eliminating its imperfections and limitations that we arrive at an understanding of God and divine mysteries. The history and the realities of the time also influence human knowledge and perspective. All these mean that human knowledge and perspective. All these mean that human

knowledge of God and its articulation need continuous revision and reformulation.

#### **1.4. The Knowledge of God as Analogical**

The kind of knowledge of God is called in classical theology ‘analogical knowledge’.<sup>3</sup> ‘Analogical’ is contrasted with ‘univocal’ and ‘equivocal’. Univocal means that a particular word or language is used with the same meaning. For God and creatures the same term or same language cannot be used with the same meaning because God belongs to the order of ‘infinite’ whereas the creatures belong to the order of ‘finite’. There is infinite gulf between the two. So the language used for the created order cannot be predicated to God. Hence no theological language, or God-talk, in the univocal sense is possible. Equivocal means that the same word or language may be used for entirely different things with the consequence that they do not signify anything. Hence the only alternative is an analogical knowledge of God and an analogical way of talking about God. The whole theological enterprise is possible only with the role of analogy.

The theory of analogy was developed by Aristotle and further refined by the Scholastic theologians, especially Thomas Aquinas. Analogy is used to explain the ontological relationship between the creator and the created and for the possibility of knowing God by reason. ‘Being’ can be predicated in the proper sense, only to God, absolutely. But all ‘beings’ share or participate in the Being of God. Analogical predication is possible due to this participation of beings in God. If there is no such ‘correspondence’ between God and humans, we cannot know God. Jesus taught us to call God ‘our Father’. This predication is neither univocal nor equivocal, but analogical. Purifying the concept of the earthly ‘father’ by removing all its imperfections and limitations, we apply it to God in an eminent way.<sup>4</sup> In God perfection exists in total wholeness in an infinite manner.

Creation is the expression of the love of God; it reflects the rays of God's perfection and beauty. Hence from the created order we can know something about God and we can speak of God.

### **1.5. God - Experience**

If we want to speak of God, we must experience and know God in some way. The fact that humankind has some kind of God experience or religious experience is attested in human history in the various religious traditions among peoples of all nations and cultures of all times and all places. The reality of religion and religious experience is a very complex one, which has been the object of study by various sciences such as, history of religion, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, phenomenology of religion, philosophy of religion and theology of religion. Every one of these sciences deals with the subject of religion from its own particular point of view. They have their own different definitions of religion and religious experience. Psychology, Phenomenology, philosophy and theology have identified different types of religious experience<sup>5</sup>. In general one may define religious experience as that intimate and immediate awareness of being touched or grasped by the divine. It is the experience of an encounter with a tremendous and fascinating mystery (R. Otto), the experience of something very strange like the 'burning bush' (Ex 3:2-6), the experience of the glory and brightness of the Sun (Transfiguration episode, Mat 17:1-13), the experience of hearts burning (Emmaus Experience, Lk. 24:13-35). This experience can be expressed only in a symbolic language. Hence God-talk or religious and theological language is not ordinary language. It is a language of its own. We may call it faith-language as symbolic language. As God or Divine is totally the other, absolutely incomprehensible and transcendent, God cannot be fully understood, and God-experience cannot be articulated in ordinary day-today language; "Theology uses ordinary

language in an extraordinary way” (I.T Ramsey, *Religious Language* 1957).

### **1.6. Religious Language as Symbolic Language**

We have mentioned that religious language or God-talk is a symbolic language. Human beings who are embodied can experience the spiritual and transcendental reality of God only through the medium of visible realities, which we call symbols, and it is only through symbols such experience can be further mediated. A religious symbol is the meeting-point between the human and the divine. God’s self-disclosure and human response meet together in the symbol.<sup>6</sup> The characteristics of religious symbols may be described as follows: a) they are pointers to something beyond themselves; b) they contain or participate in that to which they point. Hence God is really what we call Him in faith language. c) Religious symbols cannot be artificially created. They function or cease to function corresponding to their ability or inability to give expression to and to mediate for the human community the reality which they point to.

Every religion is a system or set of such symbols, images, stories, narratives, beliefs and rituals. It is the mutual participation in these symbols, which gives coherence, unity, continuity and solidarity to the community. Two examples of symbols may be given: Jesus Christ is the supreme symbol of Christianity. In Jesus the divine and the human met together and united in the supreme way. In the person of Jesus we find the fullness of God’s revelation and the fullness of human response. In Jesus we meet God, experience God and he is the medium of God’s self-communication or self-gift to humankind. Jesus Christ is the Sacraments of God. Jesus not only points to God, he is God-incarnate.

Another example is the Eucharist, which is the sacrament and symbol of Christ’s presence in the Church, in the Christian community. In the Eucharist the Christian believers meet Christ and

experience Christ as the Eucharist is Christ, while at the same time it contains or participates in Christ; it is his Body. Christ's presence in the Christian community is expressed, experienced and mediated by the Eucharist. But Christ's presence in the Church and in the world is already there; it is a reality, even prior to the Eucharist is the symbol of this presence.<sup>7</sup>

Christian theology does not simply deals with proving God's existence and human being's capacity to know God and speak of God. But on the other hand, it presupposes faith, and it is a faith-reflection. However, what we have discussed above provides a solid rational foundation to Christian theology. What we have said above establishes that God's revelation or God's self-communication and human response in faith are based on a strong philosophical and anthropological foundation. After all, God's revelation or self-gift reaches us only through our mind, reason, body and sense perception, either of the individual or of the community, mediated through symbols, and we can understand, express, articulate and mediate it only through symbols and by means of symbolic language. Hence, not only natural theology, but also Christian theology has a symbolic function.<sup>8</sup>

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902, Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 1937, Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* 1950.

<sup>6</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2

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# Definitions of Christian Theology

**B**y natural reason man can know God and the basis of his works. But there is another wonder, which is the knowledge, that man cannot possibly arrive at by own powers: the order of divine revelation through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man (Vatican 1, *De Fide*). This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. God has fully revealed this plan by sending and his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 50).

God creates, conserves and provides everything and from the created realities humans can know God, But from the very begin God also revealed himself and invited humans to la communion with him.”At various

times in the past and in different ways God spoke to our ancestors through the prophet in our own times, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son” (Heb 1: 1-2) And humankind responded to God’s invitation through faith. God’s revelation and its counterpart, human faith, and their rational understanding constitute the subject matter of Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> And yet, within this basic framework itself, there have been various understandings, emphases, and definitions of Christian theology. The different definitions of theology derive from divine and different perspectives, such as, etymological origins, conventional usage in the past, ideological standpoints, different systems and thought patterns and different goals and objectives.

## **2.1. Theologia**

The term theology derives from the Greek words, (Èãò-*theos*-God and Èãïò-*logos* -word, discourse, science) which literally means, “discourse on God”, ‘science of God, God-talk etc. Plato and his master Socrates (5-4 B.C.) used the term *theologia* to point out some of the statements and discussions in the Greek poets on gods’ in order to criticize them as unbefitting divine beings. Aristotle used the term for his metaphysics or ‘First Philosophy’, which explained the whole of reality in terms of the ‘Absolute Principle’ or ‘Supreme Mind’ The Fathers of the Church, starting with Clement of Alexandria and Origen, began to use the term theology for the Trinitarian and Christological discussions of the time, and subsequently for the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. Christian theology in its beginnings was simply the study and interpretation of Sacred Scriptures. With the ‘Scholastics’ and the establishment of the system and institution of ‘universities’ theology became a specialized academic discipline along with arts, medicine and law. During this period theology meant the entire gamut of Christian doctrines and Scriptures and their rational and systematic



explanations. The classical definition of theology derives from this period. It was the definition of St. Anselm, which is widely used by all even today.

## 2.2. Faith Seeking Understanding

St. Anselm defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, 'faith seeking understanding'.<sup>2</sup> This definition is self-explanatory. By theological activity Christian faith tries to understand itself in rational terms. In other words, rational activity is called in to understand and explain faith. Hence theology is not a mere rational activity, not a human search or quest or investigation on God, based on reason alone, but a search to understand God's Words and action revealed in human history for the salvation of humankind.! That is to say, theology is primarily an activity of faith; it is a science of faith. Faith experience is the starting-point of theology. Theological activity can be carried out only with a living experience and practice of faith. On the one hand, it starts with faith, is guided by faith, and on the other hand, it enhances faith. Anselm would say therefore, *credo ut intelligam*. 'I believe in order to understand' Faith alone can lead to real understanding; God's Word alone can be the ultimate answer, Human intellect, left to itself, is unable to understand the mystery of God and his activity.

Hence, practically speaking, the guidance for the theologian is the Word of God attested in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Therefore, all discussions on God or religion will not fall into the category of theology, Philosophy of God, Philosophy of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, Phenomenology of Religion, Psychology of Religion and similar sciences may deal with the Absolute Reality and religious experience But they cannot be called theology, as they are not explicitly and formally guided by faith or 'God's revealed Word'. In other words, their starting-point is not faith, but the empirical, observable, scientific data and they

draw conclusions according to the principles and norms of each of these sciences.

In spite of the emphasis on faith, for Anselm and the Scholastics in general, theology also has a rational dimension. Human intellect and reason critically examine faith and its practice, analyze, organize, explain, articulate and spell out its implications and consequences, and apply them to life. Here reason is guided and enlightened by faith in its understanding of the mysteries of faith, though not in any exhaustive way. Thus rational and critical activities save faith from falling into irrational superstition and dogmatism. Theological and rational activities move spontaneously from faith-experience to its expressions in doxology, witness, worship, beliefs, doctrines and other intellectual and rational articulations and elaborations. *Fides quae* (believe in) implies and leads to *fides quae* (believe that). This means that faith-experience or our response to the self-gift of God (*fides quae*) implies a rational content and involves consequences that need to be expressed or articulated in beliefs and doctrines (*fides quae*).

The definition of Anselm tries to strike a balance between fideism and rationalism. Fideism accepts everything revealed by God without any attempt to scrutinize it by reason. Rationalism rejects everything that is not clearly understood by reason. Avoiding both extremes, this understanding holds that “theology’s source and starting point must always be the word of God revealed in history. While its final goal will be an understanding of that word, which increases with each passing generation. Yet, God’s word is Truth (cfr. John 17,17), the human search for truth-philosophy, pursued in keeping with its own rules - can only help to understand God’s word better.” (*Fides et Ratio n. 73*).

This definition, ‘faith seeking understanding’, however, needs further refinement and clarification what is the meaning of faith here?

It was very often understood as a set of truths and doctrines revealed by God, and the task of theology was seen just to understand and explain them, examine the relationship among these truths and draw conclusions from those truths. But God's revelation is primarily God's self-communication and the invitation to share God's life and salvation, and not the mere revelation of a set of truths or doctrines. Faith is an existential attitude rooted in a fundamental option, which permeates the believer's whole existence in response to God's call and gift. By faith humans freely commit themselves entirely to God who reveals or gives Himself. Of course, free human response is inspired, moved and assisted by God's grace. God's grace is first (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no.5). If faith involves an existential attitude and absolute commitment to God, and not merely a set of truths, then faith is never a finished product, just to be understood and handed over intact as something ready-made. Faith as an orientation, a fundamental option, an activity and commitment, is never perfect, but often feeble and lukewarm, and yet always dynamic. Faith needs growth and development. It must be also pointed out here that time and culture always situate understanding'.<sup>3</sup>

A pilgrim character belongs to the very nature of the Church. The Church will be only gradually led to the understanding of faith and to the fullness of truth. Hence the task of theology is not simply to hand over or to communicate a particular 'understanding' of faith, held at a particular point in history. The task of theology is a continuous seeking for new understanding' of faith and its implications for life. Every new generation has to struggle and give an account of their faith in their own times, an account we must give ourselves and others of the truth of our hope (1 Pet.3: 15). No one can ever resolve completely the tension between faith and reason, between theology and the mystery. This polarity is healthy and fruitful, and is the source of "all theological creativity and newness.

### 2.3. Eastern Approach: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

The approach of the Eastern Churches to theology was quite different from the Scholastic approach of the West. The emperor Diocletian in the 4<sup>th</sup> century divided the Roman Empire into East and West, and with the sons of Theodosius I, East and West became two empires and two different groups of Churches with their own different customs, disciplines, liturgies and theologizing methods.<sup>40</sup> In the investigation of revealed truth, East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming divine things. It is hardly surprising then if sometimes one tradition has come nearer than the other to an apt appreciation of certain aspects of a revealed mystery, or has expressed them in a clearer manner. As a result these, various theological formulations are often to be considered as complementary rather than conflicting. With regard to the authentic theological traditions of the Orientals, we must recognize that they are admirably rooted in holy Scripture, fostered and given expression in liturgical life, and nourished by the living tradition of the Apostles and by the writings of the Fathers and spiritual authors of the East” (Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* no. 17).

Indeed, theological reflections must flow from faith-experience, and liturgy is one of the primary sources or a unique source of faith experience. The Liturgy and the Sacraments not only express but also mediate the faith-experience. But the dictum can be used also in the reverse order *lex credendi lex orandi* which would mean that the “law of faith or belief is the law of prayer”. It means that prayers and liturgies are the products of faith-experience. On the one hand the faith-experience expresses itself in forms of prayers and worship and on the other hand; prayers and liturgies mediate the faith experience. Liturgy also needs a strong theological foundation, lest it falls into superstition and sheer emotionalism.

Moreover, when we say that liturgy is the source of faith-experience and thus the *locus theologicus* is an invitation to make our liturgies real celebrations of faith-experience and thus to make them real sources of theological reflection. The East equally rejects a sterile liturgy lacking in faith experience. The source of theological reflection is the liturgical experience, not merely any particular liturgical text or rubrics however ancient they are.

#### **2.4. Theology as Faith-Reflection on Reality<sup>5</sup>**

Scholastic theology, as it entered into universities and academic circles, led to speculative philosophical theology and arid intellectualism. The Protestant reformers reacted to this and proposed the *sola scriptura* principle. Later, the Enlightenment and Rationalism dismissed all authorities, whether Bible or the Church and theology became once again pure philosophical and national discourse on God, human being and world. Romanticism emerged during this period as a reaction to Rationalism, and reasserted the role of human experience, Christianity was seen not as a set of doctrines and systems but as a sharing in the religious experience of Christ. The task of theology was understood as identifying analyzing and articulating this experience in order to draw its consequences for the life of the community. Romanticism stressed the role of the individual in the community and for the community. Socialism and Marxism overemphasized society and community at the expense of the individual. The pendulum swung to the other side once again with Capitalism and some of the modern philosophies like Existentialism, which emphasized the person and the individual. The role of theology was perceived as the understanding of the Reality of which humans are part and parcel. Political theologies and Liberation theologies emphasized the role of theology not mainly as ‘understanding the reality, but as ‘changing the reality with special focus on the society rather than on the individual. This historical

perspective of the general theological scenario is, indeed, too simplistic. However, a few modern definitions of theology may be very briefly introduced in this overall historical background.

Christian theology was never understood as an exclusive treatment on God. Thomas Aquinas had brought everything under the sun into theology. Theology used to discuss everything, including God, humankind and world; of course, everything from the perspective of faith or under the light of faith. Hence theology was generally understood as ‘faith-reflection on reality’. With the emergence of the awareness of historical consciousness and the human character of all theological language, a theology ‘from below’ beginning with human experience was recommended to complement the theology ‘from above’. Within the anthropological and existentialistic philosophical framework, Karl Rahner called theology ‘Theological Anthropology’.

## **2.5. Theology as Theological Anthropology<sup>6</sup>**

Karl Rahner remarked that whatever we say about God says something about us, and whatever we say about ourselves says something about God and humanity are correlative terms. “soon as man is understood as the being who is absolutely transcendent, in respect to God, anthropocentricity and these centricity in theology are not opposites but strictly one and the same thing, seen from two sides” (K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Volume 9. p.28). The object of theology is not God as such, but man as related to God. What theology discusses is God’s plan of human salvation as revealed by God. Therefore theology deals formally not with God, but with human beings in relation to God, their fundamental openness to God, about *the mystery of God’s plan for human salvation*. The God of theology is a God related to the humans, understood by them only because of their transcendental horizon. Theology, in fact,

speaks more about humans than about God. Hence theology can be rightly understood as *Theological Anthropology*.

‘Human beings’ are not one theme among many in theology.

All theological questions are part of humanity’s theological understanding of itself. Revelation is the revelation of the salvation of humankind, not revelation of God in Himself. All questions of theology, Trinity, Christology etc have to be read and understood anthropologically, i.e. what is their meaning for the human person and human salvation? What are the roles and relations of the Three Persons in God for human salvation? Christology cannot be conceived without the transcendental openness of human beings to God, their *potentia oboedientialis* for “hypostatic union”. Similarly all theological topics have to be rightly seen from the anthropological side. This is the theology from below that is necessary for our time so argued Rahner. Only such an understanding of theology and such treatment of theology are acceptable to modern women and men. They feel that many of the statements of theology are forms of mythology and are not to be taken seriously. Simply by appealing to the mystery, which God has revealed is equally unacceptable. Theological statements are to be formulated in such a way that what is meant by them is to be connected to our own human self understanding as manifested in our experience. Only then theology will become relevant and meaningful. It should not be seen as reductionism, i.e. reducing everything to human experience. We can only speak about a God as known to us, as revealed to us, and as received by faith. It does not mean that God is simply our creation, or only an object of our experience.

## **2.6. Theology as Critical Reflection on Christian Praxis<sup>7</sup>**

As we have indicated above, in the early centuries theology was just the meditation on the Sacred Scriptures and their interpretation.

is whole purpose was the enhancement of sanctity, spiritual perfection, spiritual nourishment and contemplation. Here theology was viewed as Wisdom and Intuitive Knowledge rather than a rational reflection or rational knowledge. Although this sapiential and spiritual dimension of theology remains always one of its permanent characteristics, in our own times 'Liberation Theology made a shift in the emphasis from knowledge and theory to praxis'. Gustavo Gutierrez defined "theology as a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word"<sup>8</sup> Theology has to deal with human beings and the realities of this world and not exclusively with the supernatural realities. The Church and all Christians have to be involved in the social, political and cultural movements of the time by reading the signs of the time and thus to be at the service of both the world and of the Kingdom of God. The Church is not to be centered upon itself, but upon the Kingdom of God. The Church has to find itself by losing itself by living "the joys and the hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of men of this age" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no.1). Christian faith is, therefore, not simply a set of truths to be understood and formulated by theology. but it is the call for a praxis and commitment for the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God.

Theology is a critical reflection on Christian praxis. In this view, the emphasis is not merely on correct understanding (*orthodoxy*), but on correct or right practice (*orthopraxis*). Critical reflection on praxis means that the concrete life of faith and the historical praxis of faith in society, including economic, socio cultural, and political issues of life in the world, have to be critically examines in the light of the Word of God Theology has to open to the totality of human history and deal with the real issues and questions of the modern world, and to respond to them. Such critical reflection must necessarily accompany concrete pastoral action in view of the total liberation of the whole of humankind from all oppressive forces and



structures. Such theology, linked to praxis, has a prophetic role, to interpret the historical events, revealing and proclaiming their profound meaning, challenging Christians for a radical and clear commitment to make this world a better place for all people. Such a liberation theology is not a special branch of theology, but a new way of doing theology. It is a praxis-centered theology that does not stop with merely offering reflections and creating new understanding, but it becomes part of the whole process of transforming the world into a new, just and equitable society, which may be called 'this-side of the Kingdom of God' or 'the penultimate of the Kingdom of God'. For a critique of this approach see Chapter IV, section G.

## **2.7. Theology as Hermeneutics<sup>9</sup>**

“Theology is the interpretation of Christian faith in the context of contemporary existential realities and the interpretation of contemporary realities in the light of the Word of God.”<sup>10</sup> Theologizing is the continuous dialogue and interaction between the Gospel or Christian message and the new realities of the time. It is the interpretation of the meaning of human life and of the totality of reality in the light of the Gospel, and at the same time it reinterprets the Gospel and faith itself. On the one hand, the Gospel or Christian faith puts questions to the actual situation and, on the other hand the present realities put questions to faith so that faith itself may be reinterpreted. The content of Christian faith needs continuous interpretation and re-interpretation, so that it may become understandable and relevant for every new age. Such interpretation or re-reading is needed both to distinguish between the core of the message and its historical and cultural expressions, and also to safeguard authentic faith. It is the task of theology to scrutinize, criticize and if necessary, to reform the Church's teachings, its understanding and formulations of faith and even to change its historical praxis.

Theologizing is therefore an ongoing, continuous process of hermeneutics or interpretation.

## **2.8. Theology as Interpretation of the Christian Story**

Christian theology is not a theoretical and speculative system of thought or a set of doctrines. Rather, it begins with the *Christian Story*, the story of God's entry into human history, the story of God becoming man in Jesus Christ in order to save the whole of humankind from sin and death. This story is recorded in the Bible, especially in the New Testament and attested in Christian tradition. There are also other stories' among other peoples, nations and cultures, the Jewish story, the Hindu story, the Islamic story, the Buddhist story etc. By 'story' we do not mean here a mere imaginative creation by the human mind. God's entry into human history is not like other physical events; they are very special events that can be grasped only by "faith, only by the human spirit the spiritual faculty of the human person. God's revelation and action in history can be responded to by a human person only in faith for which the initiative (grace) should come from God himself. Some people prefer the term 'story' rather than faith, as faith is an abstract term, which may very often be misunderstood as a set of truths revealed by God and accepted by a human person. Human experience of the Divine can be expressed only in symbolic language, as we had mentioned elsewhere. Story, myth, narrative and poetry are part of this symbolic language. Thus the term story (narrative, myth) indicates the mystery aspect of the event or reality and its symbolic character.

Hence Christian theology may be also defined as the interpretation of the world and human life in the light of the Christian Story. Some theologians prefer the term 'mythos' to story faith, narrative' and 'world-view According to this view the terms 'story and narrative' are used also for non-sacral and ordinary events and imaginative

creations. The terms, “faith and world-view’ have an intellectualistic and privatistic base. Hence, the term “mythos is introduced. Mythos is used to designate that set of symbols, rituals, narratives and beliefs which taken together announce and mediate the presence and action of the Divine in the life a community of persons.”<sup>11</sup> Theology may be thus defined as reflection upon Christian mythos. However, the term mythos’ can be misunderstood if not properly explained.

## **2.9. A functioning Definition of Theology**

Drawing inspiration from the many definitions of theology given above, we would propose a working definition of theology as follows:

Christian theology is a systematic and critical interpretation on the meaning of human life and reality in general from the perspective of the Revelation in Jesus Christ on the one hand, and a reinterpretation of Christian Faith on the other, in the light of the new experience and context of the changing realities of the world, in and by the believing community.<sup>12</sup>

This working definition of theology is self-explanatory in the light of the other definitions. It is a systematic reflection and interpretation because theology tries to present a coherent view in which, all the different elements become parts of an integrated whole. The meaning and truth of one part is derived and verified from its integral relation with the other parts and the whole in its unity and coherence. Theology is a critical discipline in its prophetic character as it challenges the present Christian faith and praxis to become what it ought to be and to constantly purify and reform itself, and thus to unfold itself until the eschatological fulfillment. It goes without saying that theological reflection and interpretation deal with the ultimate meaning and mystery of human life and of reality in its totality, including the human, the cosmic and the Divine, from the perspective of Christian revelation, as enshrined in the Bible and the Christian

Tradition. On the other hand, in theological interpretation, Christian faith and praxis themselves are constantly challenged by the human sciences and scientific developments and new experiences derived from the changing realities of the world. It means that Christian faith itself, while maintaining certain continuity, needs continuous reinterpretation, reformulation and reform both in theory and praxis. Finally the whole process of theologizing takes place within the believing Christian community, of course, led by the individual theologians and the authentic teachers of the Church or the Magisterium. Christian theology is not simply produced by the creative minds of individual theologians independent of the Christian community or the Church. Theologians are called to be the spokespersons of the community even in their prophetic criticism. Further elaboration of some of these points will be given later in the next chapter.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *A Theology of Liberation*, 1974, 6-15.

<sup>9</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. *Introduction to Theology*, London, 2ff.

<sup>12</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

## Chapter 3

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# Theology and other Sciences

Science (*scientia*) means knowledge, a system of clear, precise and valid knowledge. There are many sciences or scientific disciplines. Physics, chemistry, geology, biology etc. are called natural sciences. Then, there are the so-called human sciences, such as, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, politics etc. Philosophy is yet another discipline. Religious sciences form another category, such as, history of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, phenomenology of religion, philosophy of religion etc. Theology may be also called a science. It is the systematic study of Christian faith, or the science of Christian faith. Similarly there are sciences of Jewish faith, Hindu faith, Islamic faith etc. In all these different sciences, the meaning of ‘science’ is not exactly the same. Each science has its own concept of science, its

own method, principles and system. The term ‘science’ can be used for any discipline, which has an object or area of study, method, principles, unity and systematization.

### **3.1. Theology as a Science**

Christian Theology can be called a science, as it deals with the Christian faith, the study of its content, its implications for life and its interpretation in a systematic way, with its own methodology and principles.<sup>1</sup> In Christian theology God’s revelation given to human persons and received in faith is rationally or reasonably understood, explained, its meaning for life interpreted in a coherent manner and applied to actual life in community. Hence theology can be called a science and it is a human and rational discipline with a consistent language, meaning and method.

### **3.2. Relationship among Sciences<sup>2</sup>**

How is Christian theology related to other scientific disciplines? First of all, all sciences explain one and the same reality, but from different perspectives, from the point of view of each science. Hence naturally, all sciences understand and explain reality in comprehensive and coherent way. Secondly, all truth and reality come from God. Therefore reality and our knowledge about it form an integral whole, and they have a certain ontological coherence whether we know it or not. Thirdly, it is the same human mind and intellect which tries to understand reality, and inevitably, the human mind will attempt to integrate every branch of knowledge into a whole in a coherent manner. Therefore, all sciences are related to one another in the unity of human consciousness. The natural conclusion is that no science can work in an exclusive way, but all sciences have to be related to one another, while respecting the legitimate autonomy of each science. The claim of absolutism on the part of individual sciences is rejected today. Each science today realizes its limitation

and has become aware of the mystery of reality, of life, especially the mystery of human life and of this universe.

### **3.3. Theology and Philosophy**

Biblical theologies, spiritual and mystical theologies, and some of the early Oriental theologies like that of the Syrian Fathers, were more poetic, narrative and symbolic in type or style. But gradually due to the close similarity between philosophy and theology, philosophical categories and systems were more and more used to express, articulate and communicate the Christian faith, especially beginning with the Greek Fathers, as we have indicated above. Thus Christian theology in the West became mainly philosophical theology. Philosophy was called the ‘handmaid of theology (*ancilla theologiae*). Both philosophy and theology deal with the ultimate questions, namely, the ultimate meaning of human life and of the world. Hence both are very much related. There is no one philosophy, but many philosophies, with different starting points, categories, methods and systems. Each philosophy organizes and interprets the data of human experience in the light of some key-category or organizing principle, such as, matter, nature, life, organism, process, energy, mind, spirit etc. This key-category is chosen by the philosopher by his/her own choice or intuition or experience, and the first task of the philosopher is to explain the key-category as the basis of his/her system.<sup>3</sup>

In all philosophies reason alone is the guiding principle. But theology while dealing with the same ultimate questions is guided by the revealed Word of God and faith. Hence the source of theology and its approach are quite different from that of philosophy. But for understanding, explaining and interpreting the Christian faith, any philosophical category or system can be used with its own strength and weakness. However, theology need not depend on any one particular philosophy as an exclusive medium of communication of

faith. Some of the Fathers of the Church like Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine and Bonaventure used Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy to explain and communicate Christian faith. For example, the Platonic philosophy of 'logos' was used to explain the Christian doctrine of creation, incarnation and redemption. Other medieval scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great and others used Aristotelian philosophy for explaining Christian faith. For example, categories of nature' and 'person' were used to understand and explain Christology, the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. Some modern theologians like Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Rahner and others used Existentialist philosophy for understanding, explaining and interpreting Christian faith. A clear example is Christian anthropology in existentialist categories. Similarly some Indian theologians like Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, Swami Abhishiktananda, Raimundo Pannikar and others made attempts to use Indian philosophical systems like the *Vedanta* for theologizing in India. The understanding of the Christian Trinity in terms of *Saccidananda* is just one example.

### **3.3.1 Role of Philosophy in the Historical Development of Theology**

It is clear that, from its beginnings, the Christian message contained in the New Testament does not avoid but rather seeks an encounter with the philosophical reflection of the Greeks. The severe pronouncements of Christians against pagan religion never included philosophy (with some exceptions). Intellectuals among the believers presented themselves to pagan society and culture as followers of the "true philosophy."

**Saint Augustine** was a staunch defender of this attitude, which he accepts and practices with due circumspection. Philosophy in itself does not lead to despise revealed truth. In fact, it is the only



solid path that allows us to understand it. Undoubtedly, theology uses concepts that come from philosophy, but it has adapted and perfected them to help us understand revealed truth.

**Saint Anselm** received the Augustinian heritage and offered a more elaborate vision of the relations between reason and faith. For St Anselm, reason is not a competitor of the faith (or vice versa): the two can talk in a common language. He called philosophy as *Ancilla theologie*- hand maid of theology. It means that divine Wisdom is higher than human wisdom, but it also indicates that philosophy is indispensable for theological work.

For **Saint Thomas Aquinas**, philosophy and theology converge in one rational construction and explanation of the Christian faith. For him, it is impossible that what belongs to philosophy be contrary to what belongs to the faith. Philosophy does not play an external or marginal role in the sacred science, but rather imparts a pattern of rationality to theology. This [pattern of rationality] permits theology to put in order, interpret and express the contents of Revelation.

With **Descartes and Kant**, philosophy becomes an autonomous science, leading to the **disappearance** of any significant link it has with theology. Sacred science is required to submit its conclusions to philosophy. The crisis in the relations between the two disciplines become more acute with the spread of Kantian thought and idealism, which many Catholic theologians espoused (with little fruit) in the first decades of the 19th century.

In contemporary theology, aside from the **dialectical opposition** between the two disciplines defended by **Karl Barth**, the ideas of **Paul Tillich** (1886-1965) have become widespread in theological circles. He applied the basic idea of his system — the “principle of correlation” — to the relationship between theology and philosophy. According to Tillich, theology and philosophy have

to be thought out together because they have a relation of mutual dependence since both have the same object, which (Tillich says) is being. This object is considered by philosophy in an abstract way and by theology in a concrete way.

The relationship between theology and philosophy is a central issue in the thought of **Karl Rahner** (1904-1984), who spoke about **hermeneutic circularity** to explain his point. Between the two sciences (he said) there exists a bilateral relation, which translates into a double “servant hood”: there is a fundamental relation of service of philosophy with respect to theology, and an analogous subsidiary relation of theology with respect to philosophy. A central point in Rahner is to defend the need for theology to count on philosophy for its work as the only way to overcome the dangers of dogmatic positivism and of Biblicism. The methodological intent of **W. Kasper** says that the discourse about God presupposes the metaphysical question about being. Thus, in so far as theology is a discourse about God, it becomes an associate and guarantor of philosophy.

### **3.4. Theology and Social Sciences**

Traditional theologies in the West used mainly philosophical categories and systems to explain the mysteries of faith, and thus constructed speculative theological systems in order to understand” reality and to explain the ultimate meaning of reality and human life. Their emphasis was on ‘understanding the meaning of life and reality. The contemporary contextual theologies, such as, Political Theology, Theology of Hope, and Liberation Theology, on the other hand, began to use social sciences, their categories and methods of analysis in the theologizing process and activity. Human and social sciences, such as, sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, and politics study the human phenomena, both individual and social, from different perspectives and by using different methods. The studies by these

various sciences and their results, though partial, are really complementary. They contribute to human self understanding. These sciences have enormous bearing on theology. Theological reflections should take into consideration the data and findings of these sciences.

The contemporary contextual theologies, especially Liberation Theology, made a departure and used mainly the social sciences as the tool of theologizing. For the main objective of Liberation Theology was not simply to understand reality but to transform the reality. In order to transform reality, they started with the analyses of the situation or reality, for which they used the social sciences, such as, sociology, anthropology, economics, politics etc. Critical reflections on the basis of the Word of God were followed in order to inspire, support and mobilize the social process of change. Thus in Liberation Theology the social sciences played a very significant role.

### **3.5. Theology and Religious Science**

Christian theology can also use the results and findings of 'religious sciences, such as, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, phenomenology of religion etc. These sciences study the religious phenomena from an empirical point of view, from the particular point of view of each science, analyze them, examine their structures and explain how they function and their role in the lives of individuals and society. Christian theology can use the findings and results of these sciences for the scientific analysis of theological data and for their comprehensive interpretation. Even the discoveries of natural sciences and developments of technology can contribute to theological reflection. No area of human experience can be excluded from theological reflection. Theology, therefore, needs today an interdisciplinary methodology in order to fully understand reality and to draw insights and inspiration from all sciences and disciplines.

Theology does not interfere with the internal laws and consistencies of other sciences and it does not make any judgment on them, but remains open to all sciences and disciplines. However, there cannot be really any opposition between theology and other disciplines. “Methodological research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God, in spite of himself, for it is God, the conservator of all things, who made them what they are” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no.36).

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Owen C. Thomas, *Introduction to Theology*, 1989, 5.

## Chapter 4

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# Goals of the Theologizing

The different definitions of theology given in the previous chapters have already shown that they have a different emphasis with regard to the goals of theology. In the definition of theology as faith seeking understanding, the specific goal of theology has understood the mysteries of faith and understanding the meaning of life and of this world. Awakenning the faith-experience or encountering the Divine and thus enhancing our divinization or holiness were the main goals of theology in the formula of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. In the notion of theology as theological anthropology the goal of theology is conceived as authentic human existence by the right understanding of the human person in relation to God and to other humans and to the entire universe. In liberation theology's understanding, the goal of theologizing is to

transform the social reality and human society. In the different methods and models of theologizing, the goals also are different, especially in their emphasis. However, at the very outset of this discussion on the goals of theologizing, we would like to affirm that the different goals of theologizing belong together; they are complementary and they cannot be strictly separated.

The theology of the early Fathers of the Church, both apostolic and post-apostolic, was apologetic and polemical. They wanted to defend and protect the Apostolic faith against the attacks both from by the heretics and from outside by the enemies and opponents of it. In the process, they also explained the faith, its content, implications and pastoral applications. Later, theology was directed to the instruction and faith-formation. The medieval period, in the context of the universities and academic studies saw the emergence of speculative and philosophical theologies. But understanding the mysteries of faith or the divine plan of human salvation and promotion of authentic human existence and salvation both of individuals and of human community were always integral parts of the goal of theology. The contemporary contextual theologies are responses to the specific problems like injustice to the poor, discrimination of the women, the dalits, the tribals etc. Their goals were restoration of justice to all, abolition of inequality, discrimination, promotion of freedom for all and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. With this general introduction on the goals of theology, we would like just to list the different goals of theologizing.

1. The origin and core of Christianity is the Christ-event and the Christ-experience. It was the Christ-experience, which held together the disciples of Christ, gave existence to the Christian community and constituted the Christian faith. In Jesus Christ they saw the face of God and in him they found their saviour and salvation. This faith-experience is transmitted from generation to generation by the Church

through the mediation of Scriptures, tradition, worship, liturgy, prayers, doctrines, beliefs, disciplines, and catechesis and by their rational as well as symbolic articulations in theology. Theology's primary task is, therefore, to awaken, strengthen and communicate the faith-experience.

2. Theology also explains analyses, elaborates and systematizes the faith and thus helps to understand and assimilate it better and better. Every experience naturally tends to its expression and articulation by which the experience is understood rationally and deepened. This is also true with regard to faith-experience. Hence theologizing is an ongoing and continuous process, which leads so ever new understanding of faith.

3. The Word of God or God's revelation is always communicated by the human word. Theology interprets the Scriptures and unveils the Word of God and its message for us today. Theology can do this only in the context of contemporary realities and experience of today. One of the important goals of theologizing is, therefore, to understand the Word of God and its authentic meaning and implications for life today.

4. Theology has both an interpretative and prophetic role. It has to help the Church in its process of discernment as regards the practices of the Christian community. In short, one of the goals or objectives of theology is to make the faith relevant and meaningful for today.

5. One of the primary roles of theology is the systematic exposition of the Christian faith showing its unity and the interconnectedness of its constituent elements. Ordinary believers perceive the unity of faith and its various elements by an intuition. Theology shows the unity and coherence of faith by deeper analysis, by moving from the centre to the periphery and from the periphery back to the centre. It

is the task and goal of theology to show this relationship to the core or foundation and its coherence to the whole.

6. The pastoral role of strengthening the faith and empowering Christian life is another important goal of theology. Theologians are to be believers, men and women of deep faith, and they should exercise their role of theologizing with great responsibility. They should not be involved in sterile criticism and irresponsible ways of theologizing. Their role is both pastoral and prophetic. Theological creativity should be coupled with the pastoral responsibility to the community and fidelity to the original and authentic Christian faith. All theologizing is to protect, safeguard, deepen and strengthen the faith of ordinary Christian believers.

7. The goal of theologizing is not only the transformation of individual Christians and the renewal or reform of the Church, but also the transformation of the whole world into the Kingdom of God. Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God and the mission he entrusted to his disciples is the proclamation and the realization of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God will be realized on this earth, though not in its full and final form, when the whole humankind will be able to live together as one community or a 'Community of communities' based on the values of the Kingdom, that is, with the values of love, justice, peace, equality and harmony. The final goal of theologizing is to enhance, promote and realize the Kingdom of God on this earth and beyond it.

We conclude this treatment on the goals of theologizing with the affirmation once again that these different goals shall not be looked upon as separate or unrelated. All of them are closely related to one another, one complementing the other. All the same, a particular method of theologizing in a particular context may have to emphasize one specific goal more than others.



## Chapter 5

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# Foundations and Sources of Theology

**A**fter having described what theology is, in the present chapter we are reflecting on the sources of theology? If theology is the interpretation of faith or the Word of God in the context of the contemporary realities and vice-versa, what are the sources of faith and the Word of God? What is the source of Christian revelation? We begin this chapter by underlining the foundations of theology- faith and revelation. It will be followed by a brief history of the debate on the sources of theology. There are several kinds of sources for theology. The primary source of theology is the faith experience of the early Christian community, as attested in the Sacred Scripture and the entire Tradition embodied in the liturgy and the sacraments, the creeds and the teachings of the Church, especially of the Apostolic Fathers etc. God's word revealed in the whole of creation and in

the entire history of humankind and in the lives, cultures, and religions of all peoples should be also attended to as resources of theology.

## **5.1. Foundations of Theology**

The foundations of Christian theology are Faith and Revelation. We have seen in the previous chapter that the starting point of theology is faith-experience, and that theology is the understanding and interpretation of the faith-experience. Christianity began with the Abba experience of Jesus Christ and the experience of the disciples of Jesus who found in Jesus their God and Savior. This faith experience presupposes God's revelation in Jesus Christ directed towards humankind in view of human salvation. Thus Faith and Revelation, though they are distinct, cannot be separated. Revelation is God's self-communication, which can be realized or terminated only when it is received and responded to by human persons in faith. Hence Faith and Revelation are two sides of the same process, and they are the foundations of theology.

### **5.1.1. Faith**

The attitude of faith is a universal human phenomenon. Every human person has some sort of faith, whether they are aware of it or not. The human person is a free and spiritual being who realizes himself/herself by one's own decisions and actions in history. Human experience shows that no finite object can really or ultimately satisfy the human quest. In every decision and action every human person in the quest for final self-realization or ultimate salvation tends to the infinite and transcendent, whatever way they may conceive it. This transcendental object or supreme value or ultimate meaning to which a person clings and which guides and inspires our whole life and action, and to which we have an absolute commitment, can be called 'faith'. Paul Tillich, the famous Protestant theologian, in his book, *Dynamics of Faith* (1958) defined faith as 'ultimate concern, the

state of being ultimately concerned. We are concerned with so many things, physical health, food, occupation, family, friends, spiritual goods etc. But what proceeds from the center of our being and what absorbs the energy of our whole heart and mind may be called 'ultimate concern. It is true that people can make passing values their gods. A person may not be even explicitly aware of their faith or ultimate concern. The object of faith may be varied according to persons and communities, and one can discuss what kind of faith is more relevant or meaningful or worthy of absolute commitment.

Abraham is called the father of faith", "the father of all who believe" (Rom 4:3). "By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go"(Heb 11:8; cf. Gen 12:1-4). By faith he lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the Promised Land, and by faith he offered his only son in sacrifice. Three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, share the faith of Abraham. Here faith means obedience to God's word and deep commitment to God's call. It is faith in God's activity in history God can be experienced in the world and in history. It is the deep conviction that God is present in history leading his people to freedom. This conviction can overcome all obstacles in our lives and provide us great courage and confidence. In the midst of failures, strophes and utter hopelessness this conviction can give us new hope and inspire us to make new beginnings. Amidst sin and death, which will give us strength, serenity and peace to set out towards the future trusting absolutely in God.

Christian faith has its own specificity and uniqueness. It is faith in Jesus Christ that in him God has fully manifested and spoken definitively. In Jesus not only God revealed himself, but also in him God has revealed what a human person and humanity is. In Jesus God revealed his plan of human salvation and the way to establish

the Kingdom of God', i.e. liberation here on earth and eternal salvation hereafter. According to Christian faith Jesus Christ is Word of God-incarnate' who by his incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection inaugurated the Kingdom of God, showed and effected human salvation. In Jesus Christ the promises made to Abraham and Israel was fulfilled, and salvation is now offered to all peoples and nations. Jesus still abides in the world, especially in the Christian community or the Church and guides both the Church and the world through his Spirit. God's decisive and definitive action in Jesus Christ in history and his abiding presence and action here and now gives confidence to the Christian believer to face all challenges both personal and societal.

Christian faith is the total response and commitment of the whole person to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is not merely the intellectual acceptance of some truths revealed by God or taught by Christ. All the same, faith has its rational, cognitive, ethical, mystical and emotional and other dimensions, which are expressed in various ways, in creeds, beliefs, dogmas, rites and rituals, moral behavior and codes of conduct etc. Hence faith and beliefs are not the same. Beliefs are doctrines, which are the rational and cognitive dimensions and conceptual expressions of the content of faith. Any conceptualization of faith will be in a sense one-sided, partial, limited, inadequate and imperfect. Hence in the conceptualization of faith in beliefs and doctrines, while there are aspects of truth, there can be changes, development and pluralism according to time, culture and categories of thought patterns. Hence, in the course of the history of Christianity, there has been clear dogmatic development. There is one Christ and one faith in Christ, but there have been different Christologies. There is one and the same faith in the salvation given by Christ, but there had been different soteriologies. There has been one and the same faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist,

but there have been different doctrines and theories to explain it. It means that one and the same faith can be expressed in different beliefs and doctrines; faith may be one, but beliefs and doctrines can be, to some extent, different and diversified. Although beliefs and doctrines are partial and inadequate, they are necessary for understanding, communicating, stimulating and mediating faith. So we cannot dismiss beliefs and doctrines as unimportant. Theology as we have seen in chapter one, functions in this realm of conceptualization and rational reflection on faith. Naturally, theology is not identified with faith. Theology only makes an attempt to understand and justify faith and applies it to life.

Can there be changes in the understanding and elaboration of faith? First of all, if faith is a personal relationship and commitment to God, there can be differences and changes in its depth and intensity on the part of any human person, especially in the course of one's physical, psychic and mental development. We are reminded here of the faith development theories of Piaget, Eriksson and others who have tried to classify the stages in the development of faith and its different patterns in the lives of human individuals. Secondly, with regard to the content of faith and its understanding and expression there will be differences according to time, history, culture and the thought patterns. Thirdly, faith itself is a perilous journey between faith and unfaith, belief and unbelief in one's own life. Often our faith is challenged and questioned by doubts in every new situation and experience. In fact, doubt can help deepen any faith that is living and growing; it clarifies and consolidates faith. Fourthly if faith is a personal relationship and commitment, there is need of passing from conventional faith to real faith. Children receive faith from their parents and community, and it is only gradually they personally appropriate and make it personal. In Europe today many people can only be called 'Christian; they are just baptized, receive fed communion are

married and buried in the Church. Many do not have any personal faith. This phenomenon is often called “Cultural Christianity. From cultural Christianity one has to change oneself personal Christianity.

Faith is not merely the assent of the intellect to a set of truths: it is a personal encounter and experience, which transforms the whole person. We see this from the lives of those who have really encountered Jesus. Their total lives were radically changed by the love of God and the love of neighbor. Faith is to be manifested in life, action, praxis, and ethical life. The New Testament has ample references to this. Love of God has to be manifested in the love of the neighbor. Faith is to be manifested in one’s behavior, not in what one says, but in what one does. Liberation theology has emphasized this point. Theology’s task according to them is not merely understanding reality but changing or transforming it. Jon Sobrino has put it beautifully as follows: “To know the truth is to do the truth; to know Jesus is to follow Jesus”.

Above all, faith is a free gift of God. “When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come from flesh and blood but from my Father who is in heaven” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 153). But we receive it normally through our parents and community, the Church. The Church sustains, nourishes and hands over the faith entrusted to it. But faith is never imposed upon anybody. It is to be received as a human free act. It is a free response to God’s self-gift. Faith, therefore, implies and anticipates God’s revelation. The analysis of faith will point to God’s self-revelation to the humans.

### **5.1.2. Revelation**

Faith and Revelation, though distinct and distinguishable, are inseparably united. They are two sides of the same event. One cannot

exist without the other. The object of faith is God, transcendently ultimate, which can be known only when God reveals himself. Revelation is God's self-communication to humans and faith is the response on the human side. Revelation becomes a concrete historical reality only when human persons receive it. God's self-revelation becomes complete only when it is actualized and concretized by the human response. Any communication and self-gift presupposes two persons and two simultaneous actions, giving and receiving. Revelation is to be received, perceived, grasped and responded to. As there is another full treatise to deal with the details of faith and revelation, here we only want to introduce the concepts of faith and revelation since they are the foundation of theology and its sources.

On the subject of revelation Vatican II practically repeats the teachings of Vatican I; but gives it a personalistic flavor. God in his goodness chose to reveal or give himself to humankind: "In His goodness and wisdom. God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature" (DV, 2). God created all things by the Word, and the created realities reveal the glories of God. God revealed himself and his plan of human salvation in history by calling Abraham, by liberating Israel from Egypt and by promising to humankind a Savior. The Council teaches further:

"Then after speaking in many places and varied ways through the prophets, God last of all in these days has spoken to us by his son' (Heb. 1: 1-2), For He sent His Son eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them the innermost realities about God... Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and

## Introduction to Theology

wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death and to raise us up to life eternal” (DV, 4).

Jesus Christ commissioned his Apostles and disciples to proclaim and communicate this revelation or gift of God or good news to the whole of humankind. The Church has received this heritage and tradition and proclaims it today. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, bequeathed to the Church by Christ, leads her to the fuller understanding of this revelation (DV, 4-5).

God’s revelation is an utterly gratuitous self-gift of God. God speaking to the humans is a human way of expressing this reality. God’s message and the gift of divine life is what it signifies. God’s word explains his actions in history and his actions witness to his word. God’s word and deed belong together. God speaking, therefore, means the communication of his message and life by his dynamic presence in the heart of reality and of every person and by his special intervention in history. Edmund J. Dunn has given a comprehensive definition of revelation. Revelation is “God’s gracious self-disclosure reaching out to humans as an invitation, as well as promise, to participate in God’s own life of unfathomable love, mediated to us through persons, nature, history, everyday experience, and, in an ultimate way, in and through God’s very Word, Jesus Christ” (*What is Theology?* 1998, p.42).

According to traditional Christian teaching, Jesus Christ is the fullness of God’s revelation. There will be no further public revelation:

Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him He has said



everything; there will be no other word than this one... The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away: and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 65-66).

The teaching on the definitive and full revelation in Christ is very often misunderstood as if we already know the whole truth and everything about God's plan of salvation. We do not know yet in any comprehensive way the mystery of Christ. It has to be gradually unfolded by the work of the Spirit who alone will lead the Church into the fullness of truth. Revelation is closed' with Christ does not mean that God is no more present and acting in history. With the resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit salvation history has already entered into a new and definitive period with the eruption of the Kingdom God into this world. God through the risen Christ and His Spirit is all the more dynamically present in the created world and in human history leading the whole creation to its final fulfillment.

In our age of pluralism and relativity of history, cultures and religions, naturally, any claim to monopoly of revelation by Christianity will be challenged. How can a single historical revelation mediate God's self-communication universally? Has not God revealed himself also to other peoples in other cultures, civilizations and religions? What about the claim made by other religions about God's revelation to them? Christian theology has not yet seriously grappled with this question. The documents of Vatican II, however, have affirmed God's presence and action in other cultures and religions:

## Introduction to Theology

God's presence and action, of course, means his revelation by his dynamic presence and deed. The task of theology then will be to explain the relationship of God's revelation in Christ and in other religions. Revelation is, after all, not God merely revealing a set of truths, but an existential experience of transcendence and mediation, which is universal, as God wills to save all people. God's revelation among other peoples and religions is made more explicit and definitive in His revelation in Christ. In Christ God fully revealed who and what a human person that He loves the whole humankind as His sons and daughters and that He is fully present and active in history liberate humankind from injustice, oppression, sin and finally from death. God's dynamic presence in the heart of reality and his communication within every person and human community mean universal revelation, which is not a threat to Christian revelation. On the contrary, pluralism of religions and of revelations calls for dialogue and mutual relatedness, searching for a community of communities or the Kingdom of God. (*Nostra Aetate*:2, *Gaudium et Spes*: 22 and *Ad Gentes*:7).

It is true that Christianity does not deal with a revelation, which is general, universal and existential experience of transcendence, but with the concrete historical revelation in Jesus Christ, which is mediated by the Church. But a universal existential experience of transcendence is the basis of historical revelation, and at the same time, historical revelation reaches human persons through the subjective existential experience. Hence historical revelation and subjective experience have to be related in their polarity.

As social beings all of us belong to a society and community. We receive many things from the community. Revelation, more precisely historical revelation, is not given to each person directly by God,

but we receive it in and through the community. Every religious experience here in our case, faith and revelation, is mediated to us in and by the community through signs and symbols, objects, events and persons. Christian revelation is, above all, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, not simply some knowledge, wisdom, or cognitive truths. It is an experience of its own kind with a holistic character, which is totally engaging one's whole person, not only one's intellect and will.

Revelation is thus a very complex reality and so is its concept. It has various components, which are often singled out and emphasized, and thus various models of revelation are presented. Revelation as *doctrine* is one model. Here the cognitive contents of revelation as propositions or deposit of truth are understood as revelation. They are either contained in the Sacred Scripture or passed on as tradition by the living Magisterium of the Church. Another model conceives revelation as the *presence* within the believer as a personal encounter with God. It is not a mere communication of some knowledge, but the presence of the living and life-giving God. A third model conceives revelation as experience, the personal existential experience, which is universal and possible for all human persons. Revelation as history is a fourth model. It is not merely an event, which takes place in the inner subjectivity of the human person, rather it is an event of history, a universal and public historical event that can be historically established by its analysis and interpreted as an act of God in human history. These models do not exclude each other; rather they must be interrelated. All these aspects constitute the different dimensions of revelation.<sup>1</sup> Revelation experience is distinct from its expressions, interpretations and conceptualization. For example, what we have in the New Testament is not revelation as such; it is the expressions and interpretations of the original revelation experience of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ.

## **5.2 Sources of Christian Theology**

Revelation and faith are integral to theology, as they form together the foundations and sources of theology; however, they never mean uncritical acceptance and blind faith. Revelation is God's gracious self-disclosure inviting people for participation in the Divine love and plan for the world. Faith is a response to the self-revealing God and theologizing is an interpretation of this faith-experience or God experience. The OT is the description of the faith-experience of Israel, and the NT is the Jesus experience of the Apostles and early Christian community. It is the record of how the humanity responded the perfect and complete divine revelation that happened in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

### **5.2.1. Revelation**

Revelation is a revealing or disclosing, or making something obvious through active or passive communication with God. It can originate directly from God, or through an agent, such as an angel or heavenly figure. One who has experienced such contact is often called a prophet. Christianity considers the Bible as divinely or supernaturally revealed or inspired. Thomas Aquinas first described in two types of revelation in Christianity as general revelation and special revelation. General revelation occurs through observation of the created order. Such observations can be logically led to the important conclusions, such as the existence of God and some of God's attributes. General revelation is also an element of Christian apologetics. Certain specifics, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, are revealed in the teachings in the Scriptures and cannot otherwise be deduced except by special revelation.

### **5.2.2. Scripture**

Bible is the collected work of faith, which the Church proclaimed as canonical with her divine authority. II Vatican Council pointed out the importance of Scripture in the Christian life as follows:

“The sacred synod earnestly and specifically urges to all the Christian faithful... to learn by frequent reading of the divine scriptures the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8). For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (St. Jerome). The Bible is word of God only to those who believe in God, because it is not merely a literature or document of scientific observations, or historical demonstration. Its human authors were neither scientists nor historians; they were all men of God who were moved with deep faith. They tried to interpret Gods intervention in the history in the light of faith and by the power of Holy Spirit. They aimed to convey how God loved so immensely the world and humankind.

Scriptures are a normative source of faith and theological reflections. In fact Scriptures are the *norma Normans* (a norm that norms) and *norma non-normata* (a norm not normed by other norms). It is because the entirety of Scriptures is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. *Dei Verbum* (11, 12, 21-24) explains the nature and authority of the Scriptures. God’s word, is a promise in the form of a saving word given to humanity. Such promises have to be accepted in the living conditions in a living manner. The Word of God is made alive in the community by the Church through Scriptures, Catechesis, Sacraments, Prayer, Liturgy, Doctrine, and devotions, customs and above all through the living faith.

### **5.2.3. Tradition**

Sacred tradition or holy tradition is a theological term used in some Christian traditions, primarily in the Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox traditions, to refer to the fundamental basis of church authority. The word “tradition” is taken from the Latin *trado, tradere* meaning to hand over, to deliver, or to bequeath. The teachings of Jesus and his Apostles are preserved in writing in the Bible as well as word of mouth and are handed on. This perpetual handing-on of the Tradition is called a living Tradition;

it is the transmission of the teachings of the Apostles from one generation to the next (in this sense there is only one single tradition, i.e., the Apostolic Christian Tradition). The term “deposit of faith” refers to the entirety of Jesus Christ’s revelation, and is passed to successive generations in two different forms: sacred scripture (the Bible) and sacred tradition (through apostolic succession).

In the theology of these churches, sacred scripture is the written part of this larger tradition, recording (albeit sometimes through the work of individual authors) the community’s experience of God or more specifically of Jesus Christ. Hence the Bible must be interpreted within the context of sacred tradition and within the community of the church. Sacred tradition and thus sacred scripture as well, are “inspired”, another technical theological term indicating that they contain and communicate the truths of faith and morals God intended to make known for mankind’s salvation. This is in contrast to many Protestant traditions, which teach that the Bible alone is a sufficient basis for all Christian teaching (a position known as *sola scriptura*).

#### **5.2.4 Reason**

Although some people - both Christians and non-Christians - consider reason to be the opposite of faith, many Christians emphasize that it is an essential aspect of their theological approach. They often use reason, like tradition, to help determine how to understand the Bible. However, most Christians do not believe that reason is infallible. Therefore, there will be times that Scripture and tradition conflict with reason, and in those cases most Christians will argue that reason is wrong.

Reason is the processing, or coordinating, factor. We have brains; and we think about what God has revealed, if not consciously, then unconsciously. Of course those of us who do theology must

consciously think our way through what God has revealed in Scripture, what we have received from tradition, and what we have experienced.

### 5.2.5 Experience

Most Christians also consider experience, which includes people's five senses as well as their thoughts and feelings, to be an important source of theological understanding. Although people's understanding of their experience is subjective, what happens to them is still real, and so Christianity must be able to explain it. However, experience should be used in combination with the other sources of Christian theology, rather than as its only source.

If the Bible is the objective, normative factor, experience is the subjective, personal element. Experience varies from individual to individual. And of course, those who subordinate the other factors to experience become a law unto themselves. Their experience becomes the model for all. Truth is what they perceive it to be.

### 5.2.6 The *Sensus Fidei*

“The *sensus fidei* refers to the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church possess in matters of faith.” The holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office: It spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name. The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when “from the bishops to the last of the faithful” they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives

not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The People unfaithfully adhere to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life (LG 12).

### 5.2.7 Magisterium

The sacred deposit, Scripture and Tradition, were entrusted by the apostles to the whole Church. The responsibility for interpreting the sacred deposit, however, lies with the *Magisterium* - the bishops headed by the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. The bishops and the Pope are formally considered to be the apostles' successors. by all the faithful, and, proceeding undeviatingly with this same undertaking, it proposes to proclaim publicly and enunciate clearly the doctrine concerning bishops, successors of the apostles, who together with Peter's successor, the Vicar of Christ and the visible head of the whole Church, direct the house of the living God (LG, 18).

“That divine mission [the spread of the Gospel], which was committed by Christ to the apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20), since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the Church, the principle of all its life for all time. For that very reason the apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society” (LG 20). “In order to fulfill such exalted functions [those ecclesiastical functions of the bishops], the apostles were endowed by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming from them (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:4; Jn. 20:22-23), and, by the imposition of hands (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6-7), they passed on to their auxiliaries the gift of the Spirit, which is transmitted down to our day through Episcopal consecration” ((LG 21). Hence, the Roman Catholic Church is said to be apostolic “because she is founded on the apostles,” and “continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles ...through their successors.” (CCC. 857).



The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this *Magisterium* is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith (DV. 10).

This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. Theologian Avery Dulles adds:

Since revelation is public, the church requires a way of publicly proclaiming the doctrine that expresses or safeguards that revelation. Catholics find evidence in the New Testament that Christ commissioned Peter and the apostles with the responsibility of overseeing the life and witness of the church. The pope and the other bishops are regarded as successors, respectively, of Peter and the other apostles. One of their most important tasks is to keep the church in the truth of the Gospel by proclaiming sound doctrine and condemning doctrinal deviations. In this function the hierarchy constitutes the church's official teaching body, or *magisterium*.

The Pope, a word which comes from a Latin term meaning father, is the Bishop of Rome and the head of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Boettner, at his coronation, the Pope is triple crowned as the Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, and Vicar of our Savior Jesus Christ. Later documents (i.e. Vatican II) emphasize

the Pope's title as Vicar of Christ and his supreme ecclesiastical authority. ...the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.

The Lord made Peter alone the rock-foundation and the holder of the keys of the Church (cf. Mt. 16:18-19), and constituted him shepherd of his whole flock (cf. Jn. 21:15 ff.). It is clear, however, that the office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter (Mt. 16:19), was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head (Mt. 18:18; 28:16-20). According to the Catechism, The "power of the keys" designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: "Feed my sheep." The power to "bind and loose" connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church.

### **5.2.8 Liturgy**

Liturgy is another most important source of theology. Two key patristic phrases are consistently employed to defend the reunion of liturgy and theology with a foundational emphasis on liturgy. The primary dictum, set forth in the fifth century by St. Prosper of Aquitaine (and source of endless debate), asserts that the law of prayer establishes the law of belief. The second phrase, promulgated much earlier in the second century by St. Irenaeus (probably the oldest use of the principle), suggests that one's theological opinion should be established by the Eucharist. Liturgical experience for the Fathers was thus both a source and a canon for their theological thought. In other words, the hermeneutical foundation for patristic theology associated in the Church's liturgical tradition, the *lex orandi*,

described as “the epiphany and the experience of the Church of herself and of her faith.”

Theology seeks to understand and interpret the tradition of the Church through the liturgy. However, to do so requires theology to turn to the liturgy not only as the source of theology but also as its object. Schmemmann’s “Orthodox hermeneutic” thus places the liturgy as its object strictly as a means to the ultimate end of discovering the liturgy as the source of theology, as the “real ‘key’” of both the liturgy and tradition. If liturgy must be the source of theology, then theology must first show how liturgy can be this source. How does liturgy function as source? This is the fundamental hermeneutic question.

An example of theology demonstrating how the liturgical tradition functioned as a source in the early Church by observing that during the early centuries of the Church a “theologian” would have been a bishop with two primary duties: 1) in his church presiding over his community’s liturgical celebration, i.e. preaching and administering the Eucharist; and 2) in his community caring for the members of his flock. A theologian in the early church was primarily a pastoral liturgist.

The bishop and his flock regularly encountered the Word of God in the homily and in the Eucharist. Theology was simply a description of that encounter. Discerning the dynamic *lex orandi-lex credendi* [“law of prayer-law of belief”] is not simply a question of asserting that what the Church believes is already somehow expressed in liturgical texts and rites, but more fundamentally that what the Church believes is an articulation of what is accomplished by God in the liturgy and experienced and first known there by the Church.

This is an important distinction that is a clear echo in two ways. First, theology is not so much an explanation of God as it is a finite attempt to find the right words to describe the faith of the Church,

i.e. what one experiences in its liturgical gathering. In other words, the *lex credendi* of the Church that is established by the *lex orandi* of the Church is a feeble attempt to articulate what God's work has done in the lives of His people within the context of the Church gathered around the Eucharistic altar. And second, the *lex orandi*-liturgical texts and rites-cannot merely be plumbed for *lex credendi* as theological doctrine. This is why many did not place much hope in the movement of a "return to the Fathers." They worried that such a movement would merely be a return to texts instead of an acquisition of the mind of the Fathers. When disconnected from the liturgical and ecclesial experience that is grounded in apostolic tradition, texts can be interpreted in any number of ways to prove any number of biases.

The emergence of Christian dogma is also from liturgy. When early Christians first began developing an intellectual foundation for the one true faith, Driscoll suggests that the need for such an enterprise was initially only recognized intuitively:

There was a massive "something" on which thinking rested, to which efforts at articulation continually referred. This "something" was the absolutely new reality entrusted to and experienced by the Apostles. Indeed, it was a Presence, a somebody filled with divine glory: Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

Their descriptions and defenses of the one true faith, then, did not primarily appeal to liturgical texts or biblical sources such as the gospel accounts of Christ or the Pauline epistles, though the scriptures (i.e. the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms) certainly were foundational for them. Instead, they consistently turned to "a Somebody", the ongoing presence of the crucified and risen Christ. And His presence was particularly perceptible, or rather, based on

Christ's promises, most certainly available in two places: baptism and Eucharist.

Both baptism and Eucharist were commanded by the Lord. And both commands included a promise. When Christ sent His disciples out to all the nations to make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Trinity, he promised them He would always be with them to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20). When He commanded them to take the cup and the bread, He promised them His presence once again through His body and blood (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). As commands of Christ, baptism and eucharist thus became the two key components of the *lex orandi* from the very beginning. And "On the foundation of what God accomplishes in these celebrations and from the community's experience of them there developed a history of thought, a history of theology. Some ways of understanding things eventually became normative themselves: *lex credendi*."

### **5.2.9 Teachings of the Fathers of the Church**

Fathers of the Church were instrumental in living, teaching and giving shape to the Christian life and practices, hence they are called Church Fathers (1 Cor 4:15). The term is used of writers or teachers of the Church not necessarily ordained and not necessarily "saints." The period of the Fathers of the Church falls in between 1-7/8 centuries of Christian era. They were the pioneers in interpreting the scriptures, instituting Christian practices, teaching correct doctrines (orthodoxy), fighting against false doctrines, etc. The vast amount of literature of the Fathers of the Church is a source of enlightenment and paradigm for theologizing for all later ages of Christians.

### **5.2.10 Papal Documents**

Official documents of the Catholic Church have evolved and differentiated over time, but commonly come from four basic sources:

1) Papal documents, issued directly by the Pope under his own name; 2) Church Council documents, issued by ecumenical councils of the Church and now promulgated under the Pope's name, taking the same form as common types of papal documents; 3) Curial documents, issued by offices of the Holy See but authorized by the Pope; and 4) Bishops documents, issued either by individual bishops or by national conferences of bishops. The types of each are briefly explained below.

### **5.2.10.1. Decretal letter (Litteras decretals)**

Once a common papal document, decretals are now restricted to dogmatic definitions and (more commonly) proclamation of canonizations and beatifications.

### **5.2.10.2. Apostolic Constitution (Constitutio apostolic)**

Apostolic constitutions are considered the most solemn kind of document issued by a pope in his own name. Constitutions can define dogmas but also alter canon law or erect new ecclesiastical structures. An example is John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, defining the role and responsibility of Catholic institutions of higher education.

### **5.2.10.3. Encyclical Letter (Litterae encyclicae)**

Encyclicals are the second most important papal documents, exhorting the faithful on a doctrinal issue. Its title taken from its first few words in Latin, an encyclical is typically addressed to the bishops but intended for instruction of Catholics at large. Most of the best known social teaching documents have been encyclicals. Examples include Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, first introducing Catholic social teaching, and John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*, expanding on the application of the social teaching of *Rerum Novarum* in the post-Cold War world.

#### **5.2.10.4. Apostolic Letter (*Litterae apostolicae*)**

Apostolic letters are issued by popes to address administrative questions, such as approving religious institutes, but have also been used to exhort the faithful on doctrinal issues. Apostolic letters do not typically establish laws, but rather should be thought of as an exercise of the Pope's office as ruler and head of the Church. Paul VI issued *Octogesima adveniens* in 1971 as an apostolic letter because it was addressed to one person, Cardinal Maurice Roy.

#### **5.2.10.5. Declaration (*declamatio*)**

A declaration is a papal document that can take one of three forms: 1) a simple statement of the law interpreted according to existing Church law; 2) an authoritative declaration that requires no additional promulgation; or 3) an extensive declaration, which modifies the law and requires additional promulgation. Declarations are less common now as papal documents, but were resorted to several times by the Vatican II Council. An example is *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty.

#### **5.2.10.6. *Motu Proprio***

Either an administrative or doctrinal document written by the pope and addressed to a particular portion of the clergy, Magisterium, the faithful or to the Church as a whole. These documents are generally quite brief and address a specific issue, which pertains to the Church in a particular time in history. A *motu proprio* can enact administrative decisions, or alter Church law (but not doctrine). An example is Benedict XVI's *Summorum Pontificum*, which relaxed restrictions on celebration of the traditional mass.

#### **5.2.10.7. Apostolic Exhortation (*Adhortatio apostolica*)**

An apostolic exhortation is a formal instruction issued by a pope to a community, urging some specific activity. Lower in import than

an encyclical or apostolic letter, an exhortation does not define doctrine. An example is John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*, affirming the meaning and role of marriage and the family.

### **5.2.10.8. Allocutions**

An allocution is an oral pronouncement by a pope, with pastoral, not doctrinal, import. Increasingly common in the modern age, allocutions are a way for popes to exhort the faithful both within and outside the context of homilies. An example is John Paul II's 2003 homily in Rijeka, *The Family Requires Special Consideration*.

### **5.2.10.9. Papal Bull**

Papal Bull is a particular type of letters patent or charter issued by a Pope. It is named after the lead seal (*bullae*) that was appended to the end in order to authenticate it. In terms of content, the bull is simply the format in which a decree of the Pope appears. Any subject may be treated in a bull, and many were and are, including statutory decrees, Episcopal appointments, dispensations, excommunications, apostolic constitutions, canonization and convocations. The bull was the exclusive letter format from the Vatican until the 14th century, when the papal brief began to appear. The brief is the less formal form of papal communication and is authenticated with a wax impression (now a red ink impression) of the Ring of the Fisherman. There has never been an exact distinction of usage between a bull and a brief, but nowadays most letters, including encyclicals, are issued as briefs.

### **5.2.10.10. Conciliar Documents**

Traditionally, Church councils have issued documents only in the form of decrees or constitutions. The Fathers of Vatican II, however, intended a pastoral rather than a strictly doctrinal council, and as a result issued a number of different kinds of documents, all



promulgated under the Pope's name and therefore taking the same name and form as papal documents. The highest form of document was the **constitution**, of which there were four (eg.: *Gaudium etpes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World). Ten other documents were issued as **decrees**, addressing specific issues within Church life (eg.: *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism). Finally, three documents were issued as **declarations**, fairly brief documents (eg.: *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty).

#### **5.2.10.11. Curial Documents**

##### **i) Instruction**

Instructions are statements issued by a Congregation, always with the approval of the pope. Instructions are usually intended to explain or clarify documents issued by a Council or decrees by a Pope. An example of an instruction is *Donum Vitae*, an instruction issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, clarifying Church teaching on the respect due in law for human life in its earliest stages.

##### **ii) Recognitio**

*A recognitio* supplies the acceptance by the relevant office of the Holy See of a document submitted to it for review by a local conference of bishops. Such acceptance is required for such conference documents to modify universal law. *A recognitio* thus gives conference documents legislative effect.

##### **iii) Replies to Dubia**

Dubia are official responses to questions (*dubia*) of bishops addressed to the Holy See seeking clarification on statements of doctrine or discipline. Dubia are addressed to congregations having jurisdictions. An example is the Letter Concerning the Congregation

for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) Regarding *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, confirming that the latter document's affirmation that the Church does not have the authority to ordain women to the priesthood belongs to the deposit of the faith.

#### **iv) Bishops Documents**

National bishops' conferences were formally established by the Vatican II (*Christus Dominus* 38). Bishops conferences issue **pastoral letters**, explaining how Church teaching is to be put into effect in the relevant country. To have authority, however, such letters must be consistent with the teaching of the universal Church; they must also receive official confirmation from the Holy See by means of a recognition from the relevant curial office. Statements issued by an individual bishop only have authority within that bishop's diocese, and only provided that such statements do not conflict with the Church's universal law and teaching.

#### **5.2.11. Dogmas of Christianity**

What is dogma? Dogma in its defined form is a truth or proposition of truth taught by the Church as revealed or as evident in the deposit of faith given to Christians in the scriptures or tradition. Dogmas are definitive proclamations of God's definitive revelation in Christ enacted by the Church in the form of a proposition of truth. God's revelation in Jesus Christ is a historical event. That faith-experience of the disciples of Christ and the early Church had to be mediated to all generations. This is done through Scriptures, traditions, liturgy, sacraments, dogmas and doctrines. Through dogmas the Church fixes the belief systems and expressions of faith in order to keep the unity of faith as well as to distinguish the true faith from false faith and heretical teachings. The Church through its magisterial authority and by the *sensus fidei* (sense of faith) of the Christian communities fixes the faith-expressions, its language and doctrines through the

dogmas. Dogmatic definitions are contextualized by the historical, cultural and linguistic factors.

**Hierarchy of Dogmas:** In the Catholic Church there is a hierarchy of dogmas. This is set by the strength of the relationship a dogma has to the foundations of Christian faith: i.e., mystery of Christ, and the salvific activities of the Christ. Those dogmas that are closely related to these foundations of faith will be valued higher and others lower. For example: dogmas on Blessed Virgin Mary stand after those on the mysteries of Christ: dogma of Immaculate Conception approved by Pope Pius IX on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1854. Dogmas are thus reliable sources and norms of reliable theology and theological reform. On the other hand even dogmas need to be theologically interpreted and when needed reformulated by advanced theological reflections.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Mcgrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (2001), 202-208.

# Characteristics of Theology

After making an enquiry into the sources of theology, now we discuss the salient features of theology, or the criteria by which we can distinguish an authentic theology or theologian. Also in this chapter we deal with the aberration of authentic theology- heresy.

### **6.1 Salient Features of an Authentic Theology**

**6.1.1 Biblical:** Theology should be fashioned out of Scripture and should go in accordance with the Scriptures. Theology is born from the Bible, lives with the Bible and finds its end in the Bible. There for authentic theological reflection finds its source in the Bible.

**6.1.2 Trinitarian:** We call theology Trinitarian because the doctrine of the Trinity is not a side point, or just one of many other doctrines. Authentic theology should

focus always on the mystery of most Holy Trinity. Giving glory to the triune God is the purpose of theologizing.

**6.1.3 Ecclesial:** Any kind of theologizing should aim at edifying of the Ecclesia.

**6.1.4 Liturgical:** Worshiping community is the basic unit of the Church. Scripture and theology was born in the heart of the worshiping community. Forming a true worshiping community is the distinguishing mark of the true theology.

**6.1.5 Based on the Patristic pedagogy:** Fathers of the Church are the champions of faith who paved the way for theology and laid foundation of the faith.

**6.1.6 Ecumenical:** aim of theology is to realize Jesus' desire that "one flock and one shepherd."

## **6.2 Theology and Heresy**

It is important here to establish the difference between theology in its pure form and heresy, which is its corruption. A heresy is a corruption of dogma and departure from biblical faith through invalid argumentations on scripture. The Apostles warned against heretics who usually corrupt truth because of sensual mindedness and illogical twisting of scriptures (2Peter 3:16). Again, "But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time that would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 17-19). For instance, in the third century, a priest called Arius began to teach that Jesus was not God but was a created being. A proper and systematic study of the Bible helped the Church Fathers to oppose his teaching, which in turn resulted in the formulation of the doctrine of Trinity.

There were heretical teachings all time in the Church. During the apostolic period there were people who adamantly argued for circumcision, adherence to Judaic customs etc. Later, Arianism (The Son is distinct from the Father, therefore subordinate to him), Apollinarism (Jesus had a normal human body but a divine mind instead of a regular human soul), Docetism (Christ did not have a real or natural body during his life on earth but only an apparent or phantom one), Gnosticism (doctrine of salvation by knowledge), Monophysitism (in Jesus there were not two-divine and human natures but only one – divine nature), Nestorianism (in Christ there are two persons- one divine and one human. Mary was not the Mother of God –*Theotokos*- but only the mother of the human Christ-*Christotokos*). There are many heretical groups exists in Christianity. For instance, Pentecostal groups, new age churches, end day groups- Emmanuel emperor, Spirit in Jesus, Adventists etc.

Schism is another term that has caused deep wounds in the heart of the Universal Church. In the early church, “schism” was used to describe those groups that broke with the church and established rival churches. The most significant medieval schism was the East-West schism that divided Christendom into Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) branches (1054). The greatest of the Christian schisms was that involving the Protestant Reformation and the division from Rome (16<sup>th</sup> Century). Rational and critical approach saves faith from falling into irrational superstition and dogmatism.

# Branches of Theology

One can rightly say that theology is a compound term which includes variety of disciplines within it. It covers all most all areas of human life. Christian theology according to its involvement is divided into the following branches:

**7.1. Biblical Theology:** It is both exegetical and theological study of the Old Testament and the New Testament involving also a study of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It involves exegetical studies of the biblical texts in the original languages. There are two great divisions:

- a) Old Testament Theology: It is usually divided into six periods: Theology of the i) Edenic Era; ii) Noahic Era; iii) Patriarchal Era; iv) Mosaic Era; v) Monarchial Era and; vi) Prophetic Era

- b) New Testament Theology: It is usually divided into seven thoughts: Theology of i) the Synoptics; ii) Acts ; iii) James; iv) Paul; v) Hebrews; vi) Peter and Jude; vii) John.

According to the Second Vatican Council: “the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of theology” (DV §11). Pope Benedict XVI opines that “Dogma is by definition nothing other than an interpretation of Scripture”.

**7.2. Historical Theology:** It is a study of Church History and the historical development of the theological concepts, teaching, and confessions. The main divisions are i) Ancient Theology (1st Century-A.D. 590), ii) Medieval Theology (A.D. 590-1517), iii) Reformation Theology (1517-1750), iv) Modern Theology (1750-1960) v) study of Contemporary theologies such as Liberal Theology (which usually does not accept the infallibility of Scriptures, sin, atonement, and the Second Return), Neo-Orthodox Theology (which emphasizes on personal faith above propositional theology and does not regard historicity and infallibility of the Bible as important), Radical Theology (treats Biblical accounts as mythological and assumes an atheistic texture), Liberation Theologies (Black, Feminist, Dalit, etc. that look for socio-economic emancipatory themes in Biblical Theology).

**7.3. Systematic Theology:** It is a systematic and logical presentation of the content of Christian faith (dogmas) and the foundation of the Christian way of life (ethics). It deals with, i) Prolegomena (first principles) ii) Theology Proper; iii) The existence of God; iv) The attributes of God; v) The Trinity; v) Creation; vi) Divine Providence; vii) Doctrine of Man (theological anthropology); viii) Christology ix) Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit); x) Ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church); xi) Eschatology.

**7.4. Pastoral Theology:** Pastoral Theology focuses closely on the pastoral tasks of the church and its members (not just on the tasks



of the pastor or pastoral team). This is sometimes called “practical theology,” but, again, I think this is a mistake. Properly understood, all Christian theology is rooted in the practices of the church and serves them and is thereby “practical.” “Impractical theology” would be theology cut off from church life and would, christianly speaking, be useless. It reflects on the Christian life and practice both within the Church and within the wider society. Therefore it makes explicit the link between teachings of the Church and its application in the wider society. Pastoral theology presupposes other branches of theology such as i) Moral theology (Christian ethics) ii) Ecclesiology iii) Pastoral theology iv) Liturgics v) Homiletics vi) Christian education vii) Christian counseling viii) Missiology.

The above mentioned four departments can also usefully be subdivided in the following way:<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Exegetical Theology:**

- ❖ Biblical studies which focus on the analysis of the contents of Scripture
- ❖ General introduction of the origins of the Bible.
- ❖ Canonical inquiry into how the shaping of different books of the Bible
- ❖ Biblical theology (inquiry into how divine revelation progressed over the course of the Bible).

### **2. Historical Theology (study of how Christian theology develops over time):**

- ❖ The Patristic Period (1st through 8th centuries)
- ❖ The Ante-Nicene Fathers (1st to 3rd centuries)
- ❖ The Nicene Fathers (4th century)
- ❖ The Post-Nicene Fathers (5th to 8th centuries)
- ❖ The Middle Ages (8th to 16th centuries)
- ❖ The Reformation and Counter-Reformation (16th to 18th centuries)

## Introduction to Theology

- ❖ The Modern Period (18th to 21st centuries)

### 3. Systematic Theology:

- ❖ Prolegomena (first principles)
- ❖ Theology Proper
- ❖ The existence of God
- v The attributes of God
- ❖ The Trinity
- ❖ Creation
- ❖ Divine Providence
- ❖ Doctrine of Man (theological anthropology)
- ❖ Christology
- ❖ Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit)
- ❖ Ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church)
- ❖ Eschatology and the theology of afterlife.

### 4. Practical Theology:

- ❖ Moral theology (Christian ethics and casuistry)
- ❖ Ecclesiology
- ❖ Pastoral theology
- ❖ Liturgics
- ❖ Homiletics
- ❖ Christian education
- ❖ Christian counseling
- ❖ Missiology

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Avery Dulles, *Faith and Revelation in Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 121.

## Chapter 8

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# History of Christian Theology

Theology as the present form is a result of great evolution and progress. Men of all times tried to seek and define god, but until God himself had taken the initiative it was remained in futile. Here we try to disclose the different phases in the development of Christian theology.

### **8.1. Evangelists and *Hagiographers***

The Sacred writers are the first theologians. The Bible is a collection of books and consequently of theologies. The Old Testament is a collection of different theologies (for example, Yahwist Theology, Elohist Theology, Priestly Theology, Deuteronomist Theology, Wisdom Theology etc.) which reflect different concerns and even different cultures. Likewise, the New

Testament is a collection of different theologies. One can note the development of the understanding of the Christ event in the different books of the New Testament. The focus of the New Testament is always the proclamation of the Christ event. But in elaborating this proclamation we find a legitimate pluralism of expression, depending both on the personality and cultural identity of the New Testament authors and the circumstances of the communities they were addressing. Consequently, it is reasonable to speak of a Matthean theology, a Marcan theology, a Lucan theology, a Johannine theology, a Pauline theology etc. in the New Testament. The New Testament is not only the source of theology but also the theology itself. It witnesses how the apostles and early church understood the Mystery of Jesus. The New Testament writers are the first interpreters of divine mystery and therefore NT is called as “Normative Theology”.

Prominent Catholic Biblical Theologians in the contemporary period include Raymond E. Brown (1928–1998), Rudolf Schnackenburg (1914–2002), Roland E. Murphy (1917–2002), Carlo Maria Martini (1927–2012), J. Murphy-O’Connor (1935–2013), Joseph Fitzmyer (1920-2016) and John J. Collins (born 1946).

## **8.2. Apostolic Period:**

Apostles and their direct disciples preaching, period of oral transmission [nucleus of first century kerygma – Jesus is the foretold Messiah and Son of God, who offered himself as a sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of humanity from the reign of sin, now in his name salvation is announced to all, repent and believe in him as the sole Lord and God]. This is the period near to the day of the Lord, the molding time of Scripture and theology, period when Scripture began to separate from Tradition and period of the formation of Creed of the Apostles

### **8.3. Patristic Period (A.D. 100-800)**

The Church Fathers come under three groups: Greek, Latin and Syriac. Prominent Greek Fathers include Athanasius (c. 296-373), Basil the Great (c. 329-379), Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390), and John Chrysostom (347-407). Ambrose of Milan (c.340-397), Jerome (347-420), Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) are the prominent Latin Fathers. Prominent Syriac Fathers include Aphraat (c. 270–c. 345), Mar Aprem (306–373), Babai the Great (c. 551–628) and Narsai of Nisibis (399–c. 502). Catholic Church considers their teaching next to Bible. As St. John Paul II would say “They are the Pillars of the Church.” The Great Fathers of the Church and the ecclesiastical writers of the first 800 years rendered important services by their positive demonstration and their speculative treatment of dogmatic truth.

It is the Fathers who are honored by the Church as her principal theologians, excelling as they did in purity of faith, sanctity of life, and fullness of wisdom, virtues which are not always to be found in those who are known simply as ecclesiastical writers, For instance, Tertullian (b. about 160) and Origen, (d. 254), St. Cyprian (d. 258) and St. Gregory of Nyssa. The characteristic of the patristic literature were apologetical and polemical, parenthetical and ascetic, with a wealth of exegetical wisdom on every page. Their theology was rooted in the Bible, especially in the Gospels and in the Epistles of St. Paul. Although it was not the intention of the Fathers to give a methodical and systematic treatise of theology, nevertheless, so thoroughly did they handle the great dogmas from the positive, speculative, and apologetic standpoint that they laid the permanent foundations for the centuries to follow? The following were the key theological developments of the period of the Church Fathers:

## Introduction to Theology

1. It was during the patristic period that the fixing of the canon of the New Testament took place.
2. During this period the role of Tradition was emphasised. The Fathers of the Church strongly insisted on the role of tradition in helping the Church to remain faithful to the apostolic witness.
3. The development of the creeds was another important element in the theology of this period. Creeds ranged from the baptismal professions of faith to the formalized creeds articulated by ecumenical councils.
4. This period also saw a better understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Dogmatic teachings about Christ were done in the first ecumenical councils. An important dogmatic framework was done in the council of Chalcedon (451).
5. The doctrine of the Trinity was clarified during this period. The Trinitarian faith was fundamentally the same both in the East and in the West. But there were differences in the theological articulation of the mystery.
6. A more integral understanding of the Church was done in this period. This period also saw the rise of the five patriarchates: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem.
7. We can note the beginnings of the science of biblical interpretation in this period. For example, Origen made an attempt to formulate the principles for interpreting the Bible.
8. We find the emergence of the first schools of theology during this age: The School of Alexandria, the School of Antioch and the School of Nisibis. These schools were the formation centers of Christian theology, seats of liturgical and biblical spirituality and research centers. There were mutual intellectual

collaboration and merging of ideas between these different theological schools.

### 8.3.1 Augustine (354–430 A. D.):

Augustine was probably the greatest theologian that the church has ever known since Paul. He was the great summarizer of the Patristic era, and the great motivator of the Reformed, Protestant era. He remains a figure of intense interest in the fields of History, Philosophy and Theology. He shaped Christian doctrine in every major category, but especially the doctrines of Revelation, God, Trinity, Sin, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology. For Augustine, theology was not only a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures, or a speculative task within culture, but also a faithful representation of the Apostolic Tradition. It included apologetics, instruction, preaching, and systematic investigation of the church's doctrine. - His apologetic theology is best seen in his works *against the Donatist and the Pelagians*. His speculative work is best seen in his *City of God* and his systematic investigation of theology can be seen in his *Trinity*, perhaps his most important work. Here the issue of the relationship between reason and revelation finds its first full treatment as a problem for Christian theology. For Augustine, theology was not only a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures, or a speculative task within culture, but also a faithful re-presentation of the Apostolic Tradition. It included apologetics, instruction, preaching, and systematic investigation of the church's doctrine. His apologetic theology is best seen in his works against the Donatist and the Pelagians. His speculative work is best seen in his *City of God* and his systematic investigation of theology can be seen in his *Trinity*, perhaps his most important work. Here the issue of the relationship between reason and revelation finds its first full treatment as a *problem* for Christian theology.

Major 7 Ecumenical Councils of Patristic Period are listed below:

## Introduction to Theology

Council	Date	Topics of discussion
First Council of Nicaea	325 (May 20-June 19)	Arianism, the nature of Christ, celebration of Passover(Easter), ordination of eunuchs, prohibition of kneeling on Sundays and from Easter to Pentecost, validity of baptism by heretics, lapsed Christians, sundry other matters.
First Council of Constantinople	381 (May-July)	Arianism, Apollinarism, Sabellianism, divinity of Holy Spirit, successor to Meletius
Council of Ephesus	431 (June 22-Jul.31)	Nestorianism, Theotokos, Pelagianism
Council of Chalcedon	451 (Oct.8-Nov.1)	The judgments issued at the Second Council of Ephesus in 449, the alleged offences of Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria, the definition of the Godhead and manhood of Christ, many disputes involving particular bishops and sees.
Second Council of Constantinople	553 (May 5 - June 2)	Nestorianism Origenism
Third Council of Constantinople	680-681 (Nov.7 - Sept.16)	Monothelism, the human and divine wills of Jesus
Second Council of Nicaea	787 (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23)	Iconoclasm

### 8.4. The Middle Age, Scholasticism (800-1500)

The terms ‘scholastic’ and ‘scholasticism’ derive from the Latin word *scholasticus* (Greek: *σχολαστικός*) which means ‘that (which)



belongs to the school'. The beginnings of Scholasticism may be traced back to the days of Charlemagne<sup>1</sup> (d. 814). Charlemagne (742–814), by a decree in AD 787 established schools in every abbey in his empire and attracted the scholars of England and Ireland. Then it progressed in ever-quickenening development to the time of Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter the Lombard, and onward to its full growth in the Middle Ages (first epoch, 800-1200). The most brilliant period of Scholasticism embraces about 100 years (second epoch, 1200-1300), and with it are connected the names of Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. From the beginning of the fourteenth century, owing to the predominance of Nominalism and to the sad condition of the Church, Scholasticism began to decline (third epoch, 1300-1500). We will analyze three great important figures of Scholasticism Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas (354-1275 A. D.).

#### **8.4.1 Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)**

Anselm of Canterbury was born in Aosta; North Italy. Anselm was deeply influenced by Augustine, whom he absorbed through every pore. Anselm saw theology as the church's response to situation requiring theological clarity. He also made famous Augustine's statement that theology is "faith seeking understanding" ("*fides quarens intellectum*"). Anselm also thought that the task of theology must include reason as a secondary source for its propositions. Still his insistence is that theology is faith, seeking understanding. Almost all of Anselm's theological works are occasional. Anselm's most famous works were *The Proslogion*, a work on the ontological argument for the existence of God, and *Cur Deus Homo* – which tries to answer the question "Why God became man?" The latter work is where he lays out his famous and influential theory of the atonement known as the "satisfaction theory".

### **8.4.2. Thomas Aquinas (1231-1274)**

Thomas Aquinas is unanimously considered to be the greatest of the Medieval Theologians. He was born near Naples 1224/5, of Italian nobility. He was a Benedictine oblate at *Monte Cassino* until 1239. He consumed the vast majority of the western intellectual tradition in a space of 1-½ years, (1252-54.). His teaching career began in 1256 and continued until death. He wrote some 9 million words, the greatest collection of which is contained in the *Summa Theologica*. This becomes the standard reference work for theology for hundreds of years.

For Aquinas, theology was the orderly synthesis and systematic exposition of the church's cardinal doctrines in the light of revelation and creation, through reason. His own theology followed the question/answer method and saw as its task the inclusion of all other branches of learning including philosophy. Theology is, according to Aquinas, the "queen of the Sciences" and therefore the ultimate source for meaning. As a result the *Summa* was a synthesis of Scripture, Theology, Philosophy, Law and Nature. Theology is not just the study of the revelation contained in Scripture, but the study of everything, with the starting point being God. "Theology is also the sacred teaching itself, still active, in the mode of developing and explicating the seeds in the soil of human reason". It attempts, in terms somewhat different than Anselm, a "faith seeking understanding". But with the accent on understanding, so that reason threatens to usurp faith as the starting point.

### **8.5 Period of Reformation**

The Protestant Reformation, a religious movement that began in the sixteenth century, brought an end to the ecclesiastical unity of medieval Christianity in Western Europe. Originally, the word reformation (from the Latin *reformare*, "to renew") suggested the removal of impurities and corruption from church institutions and

people, rather than separation from the unified Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation generally is recognized to have begun in 1517, when Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German monk and university professor, posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Luther argued that the church had to be reformed. He believed that individuals could be saved only by personal faith in Jesus Christ and the grace of God. He thought the Catholic Church's practices focusing on works (such as pilgrimages, the sale of indulgences to obtain forgiveness, and prayers addressed to saints) were immoral. Lutheranism framed by its three famous *solas*: *sola scriptura*, *sola fides* and *sola gratia*. Martin Luther envisioned a move back to the Patristic emphasis on the explication and interpretation of Scripture as the substance of theology. Luther clearly joins hands with Augustine in stating that theology was "faith seeking understanding", but the emphasis is just as clearly on the text of Scripture as the point of departure for this faith. In his first lectures on the Psalms he writes, "No one arrives at knowledge of the Godhead if he is not first brought low and has descended to knowledge of himself. For here he also arrives at knowledge of God."

Thus, Luther distances himself from the Mediaeval Scholastic approach to theology, which conceived of it as the task of confirming the reasonableness of revelation. Justification by faith is the point of departure; the rest is worked out from there. But the knowledge of God and the self are to be gained only in mutual relation. The starting point, and only authority for this knowledge is the Scripture, where God has revealed Himself and ourselves. Luther's theology is centered on a close reading of Scripture and oriented towards the preaching and pastoral life of the church. Reformation movements can be positively evaluated as an effort to free theology from scholasticism. Luther tried to bring back Christian theology to its Biblical sources.

### **8.5.1 Counter-Reformation (Catholic Reformation)**

The Roman Catholic Church responded with Counter-Reformation (Catholic Reformation) to the protestant reformation. One of the important agencies of the Catholic Counter-Reformation was the Society of Jesus, founded by St. Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556). We can also find a renewal in the religious life during this period. Important religious reformers were St. Peter Canisius (1521-1597), St. Charles Borromeo (1538–1584), St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), St. John of the Cross (1542–1591), St. Philip Neri (1515-1595) and St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622).

The Church defended the traditional faith through the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent met over a period of eighteen years (1545-47, 1551-52, 1562-63). It met the challenge of the Protestant Reformation by clarifying doctrine and by instituting reforms that improved the quality of the clergy. The Council condemned the teachings of the Protestant Reformers and defined the traditional Church teachings in the areas of Scripture and Tradition, Original Sin, Justification, the Sacraments, the Eucharist and the veneration of saints. The council abolished the abuses and introduced disciplinary reforms affecting the sale of indulgences and the education of the clergy. Council of Trent issued condemnations of what it defined to be heresies committed by proponents of Protestantism, and also issued key statements and clarifications of the Church's doctrine and teachings, including scripture, the Biblical canon, sacred tradition, original sin, justification, salvation, the sacraments, the Mass, and the veneration of saints.

The first Vatican council was convened by Pope Pius IX. It was declared in 1868 and was convoked in December 1869. The discussions started with a scheme of Faith (De Fide) and later a revised constitution on faith, *Dei Filius*, was promulgated on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1870. It has four chapters on God the Creator, Revelation,

Faith, Faith and Reason, respectively. The council wanted to discuss and promulgate teachings on Papal Infallibility and Papal Primacy. But there were extreme positions in the council members and no comprehensively acceptable formula was achieved. Finally the document *Pastor Aeternus* (Eternal Pastor), was accepted in which Papal Infallibility was restricted to specific issues regarding faith and morals on which the Pope teaches '*ex cathedra*' (out of his chair of official teaching capacity). Soon due to the outbreak of war between France and Prussia as well as the Italian occupation of the papal territories of Rome on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1870 compelled the council fathers to close the process without successfully attaining the goals of the council.

20<sup>th</sup> century is known as the century of the Church. Theology, from its scholastic hangings freed itself. Richness of Scripture, Liturgy and Tradition regained. New concept of ecclesiology- Church as people of God developed. Scripture, got predominance in the theological process. Emergence of contextual theologies is something very special to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Theology in the modern period has suffered great attacks from philosophical trends and isms such as Rationalism, Idealism, Empiricism, Existentialism, Marxism, Humanism, Pragmatism, Liberalism, Personalism, and Feminism etc. Risk of a 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian is to address these isms and maintain the Catholic faith amidst their invasion alive.

### **8.5.2 Second Vatican Council**

Second Vatican Council 1962-65- an epoch making event in the modern history of theology. 21<sup>st</sup> ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, announced by Pope John XXIII, as a means of spiritual renewal for the church and as an occasion for Christians separated from Rome to join in a search for Christian unity. It sought, in the words of Pope John XXIII, *aggiornaménto*, "to bring the church up to date," and many of the council's decrees did bring the

church into the modern world. Biblical studies got predominance in the Catholic theological circles (*Providentissimus Deus* 1893, *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) *Dei Verbum* (1964), *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), *Verbum Domini* (2010).

### **Some Unique Features of the Council**

1. The council was convened not for condemnations but for updating the Church for the sake of its own spiritual vitality, Christian unity and world peace.
2. By virtue of the number of the participants the Second Vatican Council was the greatest of all the councils held by the Church. The council had more than 2600 bishops from all over the world and the number of participants approached 3000, including the theologians and other experts.
3. The Second Vatican Council was the most representative council in the history of the Church with its bishops drawn from every major continent and culture.
4. The Second Vatican Council was also more representative than earlier councils in terms of non-Catholic and lay observers. Almost every major Christian Church was represented in the Council. 52 Lay observers were there in the second session of the council, 29 of whom were men and 23 women, including 10 nuns.
5. The Second Vatican Council was the first ecumenical council to have available to it the modern means of communication. It was the first to be covered by newspapers and magazines as well as by radio and television.

### **8.6 Theology in the Contemporary Period**

The most important event in the history of the Church during this period after the Second Vatican Council we find the emergence of many contextual theologies. Contextual theology means theology in

a particular context. Contextual theologies can be continental (Asian Theology, African Theology etc.) or even national (Indian Theology, Filipino Theology etc.) or it can be a theology based on the particular situation of a group of people (Black Theology, Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology etc.).

### **8.6.1. Liberation Theology**

Liberation theology is a movement in theology which interprets the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions. It is an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor's suffering, their struggle and hope, and a critique of society and the Christian faith through the eyes of the poor. It began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1950s–1960s. Although liberation theology arose principally as a moral reaction to the poverty caused by social injustice in Latin America, it has grown into an international and inter-denominational movement. Prominent Liberation Theologians include Juan Luis Segundo (1925–1996), Leonardo Boff (born 1938), Gustavo Gutiérrez (born 1928), Jon Sobrino (born 1938)

Liberation theology focuses on the human being in need of liberation. The preferential option for the poor has become the slogan of the theology of liberation. Preference implies the universality of God's love, which excludes no one. It is only within the framework of this universality that we can understand the preference, that is, what comes first. Liberation theologians assert that God is revealed as having a preference for those people who are “insignificant,” “marginalized,” “unimportant,” “needy,” “despised” and “defenseless”.

### **8.6.2 Feminist Theology**

Feminist theology is an approach to theology developed largely in USA since 1968, but now spread to all over the world. It seeks to advance and understand the equality of men and women morally,

socially, spiritually, and in leadership from a Christian perspective. It tries to reconsider the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies from a feminist perspective. Some of the goals of feminist theology include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities, reinterpreting male-dominated imagery and language about God, and studying images of women in the Scriptures. Feminist theology regards women, their bodies, perspectives and experiences as relevant to theology. It demands the use of a language that does not reflect a male power structure. Prominent Feminist Theologians are Mary Daly (1928–2010), Rosemary Radford Ruether (born 1936) and Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza (born 1938).

Some feminist theologians try to reconcile Christianity and feminism by arguing that Christianity read in the right way, advocates equality and justice in the same way that feminism does. For example, the American theologian Leonard Swidler argues that Jesus was a feminist. Some other feminist theologians advocate a radically new reading of Christian theology. According to them, women and the experiences of women are the criteria by which all theology has to be judged. Only some texts within the tradition are regarded as usable. The most prominent writers of this second group are Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza.

### **8.6.3 Political Theology**

Political theology is a new trend in theology that began during the latter part of the 20th century. It was a theological response to existentialism that stressed the public significance of Christian eschatology. Political theology investigates the ways in which theological concepts are related to the politics, society, and economics. Two important proponents of political theology are Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz. The connections between Political theology and liberation theology are clear.



Metz explored the concept of *political theology* throughout his work *The Vocabulary of Political Theology*. In contrast to what it takes to be the traditional concentration of theology on the individual and on personal holiness, Metz sees ‘the deprivatising of theology as the primary critical task of political theology’. Orthopraxy becomes the mark of true discipleship more than the traditional orthodoxy. He argued for the concept of a ‘suffering God’ who shared the pain of his creation. He criticizes what he terms ‘bourgeois Christianity’ and believes that the Christian Gospel has become less credible because it has become entangled with bourgeois religion. His work *Faith in History and Society* develops fundamental theology from this perspective.

#### **8.6.4 Dalit Theology**

The term ‘Dalit’ derived from the Sanskrit root *dal* means broken, cracked, trodden down, crushed or destroyed. Dalit theology is a branch of Christian theology that emerged among the Dalit castes in India in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> It shares a number of themes with liberation theology. Dalit theologians have seen passages in the gospels, such as Jesus’ sharing a common drinking vessel with the Samaritan woman in John 4, as indicating his embracing of Dalitness. The parable of the Good Samaritan is also seen as significant, providing a life-giving message to the marginalized Dalits and a challenging message to the non-Dalits. A major proponent of Dalit theology was Arvind P. Nirmal (1936–1995), a Dalit Christian in the Church of North India. Nirmal criticised Brahminic dominance of Christian theology in India, and believed that the application of liberation theology to India should reflect the struggle of Dalits, who make up about 70% of Christians in India.

The emphasis of Dalit theology is on the reign of God. Consequently, the stress is not only on Jesus’ option for the poor and the outcasts, but also on his call to everyone to a new fellowship

in which all are equal and there is no discrimination. Such a community must first of all be a community that struggles against any form of injustice and oppression.

#### **8.6.4 Black Theology**

Black Theology tries to understand and interpret the Word of God in the historical, religious, cultural and social life of the Black communities especially the injustice done towards Blacks in American and South African contexts. Black theology makes use of some of the elements of the liberation theology. In Black Theology philosophical views of God are largely ignored in preference for the concerns of the oppressed. The focus is given to God's actions, and his delivering of the oppressed because of his righteousness.

Proponents of black theology are concerned specifically with the social and political aspects of salvation more than the spiritual. In other words, salvation is physical liberation from white oppression rather than freedom from the sinful nature and acts of each individual person. According to them, a white man who is in power cannot be a Christian, unless he gives up that power and give it to the black man. James Cone is a proponent of Black Theology in America. Black theologies were popularized in Africa in the early 1970s by Basil Moore, a Methodist theologian in South Africa. In the United Kingdom, Dr. Robert Beckford is a prominent black theology practitioner.

#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Charlemagne, also known as Charles the Great or Charles I, was King of the Franks from 768, King of the Lombards from 774, and Holy Roman Emperor from 800. He united much of western and central Europe during the early Middle Ages. He was the first recognized emperor to rule from Western Europe since the fall of the Western Roman Empire three centuries earlier. The expanded Frankish state that Charlemagne founded is called the Carolingian Empire. Charlemagne has been called the 'Father of Europe' as he united most of Western Europe for the first time.

## Chapter 9

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# Important Modern Day Theologians

**9.1. Henri-Marie de Lubac SJ (1896-1991).** He was a French Jesuit priest who became a Cardinal of the Catholic Church, and is considered to be one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. A *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council, he was made a cardinal in 1983. His vast literary output covers a range of subjects, including the Church, grace and the supernatural, the history of exegesis in the middle Ages, *Pico della Mirandola*, and Joachim of Fiore. He helped to create the intellectual climate that made the Second Vatican Council possible, largely by opening up the vast spiritual resources of the Catholic tradition which had been cramped by post-Tridentine ‘baroque’ theology. He was one of the founders of ‘Sources *Chrétiennes*’, a series of patristic and medieval texts,

## Introduction to Theology

with French translation, now involving scholars from all over the world. He died on September 4, 1991, Paris and is buried in a tomb of the Society of Jesus at the Vaugirard cemetery in Paris.

Important works:

*Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man,*  
*The Drama of Atheist Humanism,*  
*The Splendor of the Church, Medieval Exegesis 2 Vol.s.*  
*The Mystery of the Supernatural etc.*

**9.2. Yves-Marie-Joseph Cardinal Congar, (1904- 1995, Paris),** was a French Dominican priest who was widely recognized in his lifetime as one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century. Best known for his work in ecclesiology (theology of the church itself as an institution or community), Congar drew from biblical, patristic, and medieval sources to revitalize the discipline. An early advocate of ecumenism, he was a major influence at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Important works:

*The Meaning of Tradition*  
*I Believe In The Holy Spirit*  
*Lay people in the church; a study for a theology of the laity*  
*Tradition & Traditions*  
*My Journal of the Council*  
*Diversity and Communion*  
*Jesus Christ*  
*The Word and the Spirit*  
*True and False Reform in the Church*  
*I Believe in the Holy Spirit: Lord and Giver of Life, 3 Vols.*  
*Power and poverty in the church*  
*The Mystery of the Church, etc.*

**8.3. Karl Rahner**, (1904- 1984), a German Jesuit priest who is widely considered to have been one of the foremost Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century. He is best known for his work in Christology and for his integration of an existential philosophy of personalism with Thomistic realism, by which human self-consciousness and self-transcendence are placed within a sphere in which the ultimate determinant is God. He was known as well for his defense of Edward Schillebeeckx in 1968, when the Flemish theologian was under attack for heresy as a result of his calls for more freedom of theological research within the church and for theological pluralism.

In 1962 Rahner was appointed as a *peritus* (expert advisor) by Pope John XXIII for the Second Vatican Council. Cardinal Koenig in Vienna selected Rahner as his private adviser on the Council documents. During the Council, Rahner worked with Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) to prepare an alternate text on the issue of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition that was accepted by the German bishops. Other topics discussed during Vatican II that showed Rahner's influence included the divine inspiration of the Bible, the relationship of the Church to the modern world, and the possibility of salvation outside the Church even for nonbelievers. Rahner's many books emphasize the continuity of modern and ancient interpretations of Roman Catholic doctrine. His works include:

*Geist in Welt* (1939; *Spirit in the World*),  
*Hörer des Wortes* (1941; *Hearers of the Word*),  
*Sendung und Gnade*, 3 vol. (1966; *Mission and Grace*),  
*Grundkurs des Glaubens* (1976; *Foundations of Christian Faith*),  
*Die siebenfältige Gabe: über die Sakramente der Kirche* (1974; *Meditations on the Sacraments*).  
*Theological Investigations* 23 vols. (1961–92).

**9.4. Jean-Guenolé-Marie Daniélou S.J.** (1905-1974) was a French Jesuit and cardinal, an internationally well known patrologist, theologian and historian and a member of the Académie française. He spent most of his time on research in patristics, and became, with Henri de Lubac one of the founders of the Sources Chrétiennes book series. Thoroughly grounded in the Fathers of the Church, who worked from Scripture, Daniélou generally avoided the neo-Thomistic terminology and approach and used a more relational vocabulary, emphasizing our self-gift in response to God's gift in Jesus Christ, with the gradual unveiling of the Trinitarian life in history. Pope John XXIII appointed Daniélou a *peritus* of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1969 Pope Paul VI made him a cardinal. One of the best citations from his works is— [T]he sacraments constitute the events of a time which is the tension between the Resurrection and the Parousia . . . Thus during the delay of the Parousia, the Eucharist prevents humanity, in this foretaste of celestial food, from tiring of waiting and from returning to terrestrial food . . . And the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity which gathers about the Christ of glory, present in the community, all nations in order to offer them through His hands to the Father.” (Daniélou, in “Marxist History and Sacred History,” 508–509). In an age filled with scientific discoveries and technological developments, Church historian Jean Daniélou dedicated the majority of his writings and teaching to the promotion of the Gospel's message of joy and hope. Major works:

*The Bible and the Liturgy,*  
*God and the Ways of Knowing;*  
*The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity.*

**9.5. Karl Barth** (1886–1968) is generally considered as one of the most outstanding Protestant theological thinkers of the twentieth century. As the founder of neo-orthodoxy, he is one of the most

influential theologians in contemporary Christian theology. Thus, it is essential to have an overview of Barth's theology in order to have an accurate grasp of the trend of modern Christian theology. In the first section, as a background necessary for an understanding his theology, the study surveyed the life and the major works of Karl Barth. He was born under the context of the conservative Reformed Church tradition, but was educated under the influence of liberal theologians, such as Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann. However, through experiences of ministering for the local church, Barth found out the importance and the priority of the Bible in the theology and in the practice of Christianity. His two prominent works include (1) *The Epistle to the Romans*, his first publication, and (2) *Church Dogmatics*, his most famous work. Barth's theology covers three major areas: The doctrine of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. First, Barth understood God as the transcendent God and the unknown God. He also emphasized the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For Barth, God is not the same God as understood by liberal theologians and the proponents of natural theology. Rather, God is the incomprehensible and unapproachable God by man himself. In this sense, there is a sharp contrast between Barth's theology and liberal theology. Second, Barth's theology is Christ-centered. For Barth, all theology should find its focal center in Jesus Christ, as well as all knowledge of God is obtainable only through Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ, who is the Revelation of God, is the foundation of theology and the knowledge of God. Essentially, Barth's Christology is built upon the tradition of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, and following in the Chalcedonian formula setting forth two natures united in the one person of Jesus Christ.

Regarding the relationship of Jesus Christ (the living Word) and to the Bible (the written word), and to the church (the proclaimed word), Barth is clear that Jesus Christ is the Lord of both the Bible

and the church. All other elements of the divine revelation and even of theology should be centered upon Jesus Christ. Third, Barth not only believes in the deity of the Holy Spirit, according to the NiceneConstantinople Creed, but also places emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as the (1) Creator, (2) Reconciler, and (3) Redeemer. Barth's understanding of the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity as well as his explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit is of significance for believers. He sees the Holy Spirit as gatherer of the believers as a community as well as the binder of the believers in Christ. In relation to the event which is called revelation, Barth adds three dimensions of the work of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit (1) ensures man what he can't ensure himself, his personal participation in revelation; (2) gives man instruction and guidance he can't give himself; and (3) helps man to experience God's revelation in Jesus ChristBarth's works, which are significant in modern contemporary Christian theology, include: 1. Epistle to the Romans (1919); 2. Die Christliche Dogmatik in Entwurf [Church Dogmatics in Draft] (1927); 3. The Word of God and the Word of Man (1928); 4. Church Dogmatics (1932); 5. The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Reformation (1938); 6. 'No!' in Natural Theology (1946); 7. Dogmatics in Outline (1949); 8. Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum [Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme] (1960); 9. The Humanity of God (1961); and 10. Evangelical Theology (1963).

## **9.6. Edward Schillebeeckx**

Edward Schillebeeckx, a prominent member of a wave of Roman Catholic theologians who helped reshape Catholicism during the Second Vatican Council. Schillebeeckx argued that although the task of theology is to speak of God, all theological language is shaped by its time and context. Therefore, the task of theologians is to translate the gospel into language which is understandable to contemporary



audiences. Schillebeeckx balanced his concern for the world with scholarly attempts to recapture the central message of the gospel - the truth that God in Jesus is reconciling the world - through critical studies of scripture and Church tradition. In connecting the truths of tradition with the concerns of the present, Schillebeeckx stressed the importance of salvation, a theological term which he broadly defined as 'whenever the good is furthered and evil is defeated.' On the basis of this definition, Schillebeeckx emphasized orthopraxis (correct-action) over orthodoxy (correct-belief). The central task for Christians is to follow Jesus' example in making salvation known by working to transform injustices. He published and lectured widely on basic theological matters like the nature of revelation and salvation, and on issues of church discipline he argued for democratic procedures in church governance. Schillebeeckx had reacted against the neo-scholastic theology that the church adopted in the 19th century as a bulwark against hostile modern ideas. Distilled from the thought of Thomas Aquinas but frequently handed on without any examination of Aquinas's writings or their medieval context.

Schillebeeckx found alternative intellectual resources in modern phenomenology, with its meticulous attention to the actual experience of consciousness. And by studying Aquinas in his medieval context, he recovered a Thomism that expounded the presence and mystery of God in far less rationalistic and conceptual ways than did its neo-scholastic versions. Strong emphases on human experience and on the importance of examining church teaching in historical context became hallmarks of Father Schillebeeckx's work. His early writing on the sacraments, for example, portrayed them as personal encounters with God rather than mechanisms for the distribution of grace. In two books — "Jesus: An Experiment in Christology" (1974) and "Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World" (1977) — he recast classical Catholic teachings about Christ around the

## Introduction to Theology

experiences that gave rise to his followers' faith in Jesus as messiah and the son of God.

His Major works:

- *De sacramentele heilseconomie*, (1952)
- *Revelation and theology*, (1979)
- *The Church with a human face: a new and expanded theology of ministry*, (1985)
- *Church. The human story of God*, (1990).
- *I Am a Happy Theologian*, (1994).
- *The Eucharist*, (2005/1948).

### 9.7. Hans Urs Von Balthasar

Hans Urs von Balthasar (12 August 1905–26 June 1988) was a Swiss theologian and Catholic priest who is considered an important Roman Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger said in his funeral oration for von Balthasar that “he is right in what he teaches of the faith” and that he “points the way to the sources of living water.” With Ratzinger and Henri de Lubac, he founded the theological journal *Communio*. Over the course of his life, he authored eighty-five books, over five hundred articles and essays, and almost a hundred translations. However, his theology is exceptionally complex and is difficult to summarize or encapsulate. This complexity is due to the very nature of Balthasar’s theological method which is a mystical, contemplative meditation on the overall aesthetic “wholeness” of God’s revelation in Jesus.

He is known for his fifteen-volume trilogy on beauty (*The Glory of the Lord*), goodness (*Theo-Drama*), and truth (*Theo-Logic*). Along with Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, Balthasar sought to offer a response to Western modernity, which posed a challenge to traditional Catholic thought. While Rahner offered a progressive, accommodating position on modernity and Lonergan worked out a

philosophy of history that sought to critically appropriate modernity, Balthasar resisted the reductionism and human focus of modernity, wanting Christianity to be more challenging toward modern sensibilities. Balthasar authored more than 60 books on such diverse topics as the theology of history, the early Christian Church Fathers, classical literature, and modern aestheticism.

Major works include:

Balthasar was better known for his sixteen-volume systematic theological “trilogy”, published between 1961 and 1987, with a concluding *Epilog (Epilogue)*. It is called a trilogy because it is divided into three parts: *Herrlichkeit (The Glory of the Lord)*, *Theodramatik (Theo-Drama)*, and *Theologik (Theo-Logic)*. They follow the threefold self-description of Jesus in John 14:6 (“I am the way, the truth, and the life”) and therefore the transcendentals *bonum, verum, and pulchrum* (the good, the true, and the beautiful),<sup>[67][68]</sup> although the trilogy begins with *Herrlichkeit*, a study of the *pulchrum*, the beautiful.

- *Prolegomena (Prolegomena)* (1973)
- *Die Personen des Spiels: Der Mensch in Gott (Dramatis Personae: Man in God)* (1976)
- *Die Personen des Spiels: Die Personen in Christus (Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ)* (1978).
- *Die Handlung (The Action)* (1981)

## 9.8. Avery Dulles

The most distinguished American theologian, a man who combined the virtues of scholarly inquiry with faithfulness to Christ and the Church. Dulles’ theological vision pivots on two unwavering axes. The first is his deeply Catholic imagination that endeavors to take account of every possible position, consolidating widely diverse

views into an authentic unity. The second is his commitment to the Second Vatican Council. Always he sought to display the continuity of that momentous event with the rich biblical, doctrinal, and spiritual heritage of the Catholic Church, even while embracing the council's significant reforms and invigorating theological developments. At Vatican II, Catholicism confronted the innovations of natural science, historical scholarship, and the secular state. Like the council itself, Dulles aspired to remain entirely faithful to the principles embedded within the Christian tradition, while applying those principles creatively and imaginatively to a new world. His theological research was dedicated primarily to the nature of the Church and to the Christian understanding of revelation. His study of ecclesiology, *Models of the Church*, remains Dulles' best-known work. Translated into many languages and still used as an important text, *Models of the Church* effectively displayed Dulles' greatest strengths as a theologian

Being the author of over 750 articles on theological topics, Cardinal Dulles has published twenty-three books including, *Models of the Church* (1974), *Models of Revelation* (1983), *The Catholicity of the Church* (1985), *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (1992), *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (1994), *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (1999), *The New World of Faith* (2000), *Newman* (2002). His latest books are, a revised edition of- *The History of Apologetics*, (revised edition, 2005), and *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (2007).

### **9.9. Gustavo Gutiérrez**

Few theologians have shaped the course of history in the way that Gustavo Gutiérrez has. His life of service and dedication to the poor has inspired millions of people. Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, O.P. is a Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest regarded as one

of the principal founders of liberation theology in Latin America. In September 1984, a special assembly of Peruvian bishops was summoned to Rome for the express purpose of condemning Gutiérrez, but the bishops held firm. Gutiérrez's ground-breaking work, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (1971), explains his notion of Christian poverty as an act of loving solidarity with the poor as well as a liberatory protest against poverty.

According to Gutiérrez, true 'liberation' has three main dimensions. First, it involves political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice. Second, liberation involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the oppressed from all 'those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity.' Third, it involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people. We have all of his works published in English up in the 'Victor Jara Liberation Theology Library', but I highly recommend *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year* (1995) which distills much of Gutiérrez's wisdom through his inspiring weekly homilies.

**9.10. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI 1927- ).** Many refer to Pope Benedict XVI as "the Mozart of Theology." Who are the personalities and thinkers who have informed his theology? What events, and which religious devotions, have shaped his personality? What are the central themes of his complex scholarship encompassing more than 1500 titles? This study attempts to shed light on the unifying melody of the policies and positions of a pontificate charged with spiritual and theological depth. Especially in the 1970s an anthropocentric shift had occurred. Emery de Gall argues that, amid a general lack of original, secular ideas stirring public opinion, Benedict XVI inaugurates an epochal Christocentric shift; by

rekindling the Patristic genius, he provides Christianity with Joseph Ratzinger's voluminous writings manage to cover virtually every aspect of contemporary theology. Trinitarian thought, Christology, revelation, tradition, theological method, hermeneutics, the relationship between faith and reason, theological anthropology, prayer, catechesis, Mariology, ecclesiology, priesthood, the theological virtues and liturgy all come into play in this evangelical *homage* to one of Catholicism's finest living theologians. Both intellectual legitimacy and the scholarship needed to propel it into the twenty-first century"—Provided by publisher.

The theology of Pope Benedict XVI, as promulgated during his pontificate, consists mainly of three encyclical letters on love (2005), hope (2007), and "charity in truth" (2009), as well as apostolic documents and various speeches and interviews. Benedict's theology underwent developments over the years, many of which were characterized by his leadership position in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is entrusted with preserving the Catholic faith in its entirety. His theology originated in the view that God speaks to us through the Church today and not just through the Bible. The Bible does not teach natural science but rather it is a testimonial to God's revelation

In his first Encyclical as Pope, *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI describes God as love, and talks about the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others through acts of charity. His letter has two parts. A theological speculative part in which he describes; "the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love". The second part deals with practical aspects, and calls the world to new energy and commitment in its response to God's love. And Benedict develops a positive view of sex and *eros* in this first encyclical, which would do away with the

Victorian view of the human body. Love between man and woman is a gift of God, which should not be exploited:

In his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI explains the concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament and the early Church. He suggests a redirection of often short-sighted hopes. Real hope must be based on faith in God who is love. Christ, the most manifest expression of God's love, dies on the cross not to end slavery, miseries or other temporal problems. Benedict argues in his letter against two mistaken notions of hope: 1.) Christians who may have focused their hopes too much on their own eternal salvation, and 2.) those who have placed their hope exclusively on science, rationality, freedom and justice for all, thus excluding any notion of God and eternity. Christians find lasting hope by finding their loving God, and this has real consequences for everyday life.

In a special letter on the Eucharist and the Church, Benedict describes the Eucharist as the causal principle of the Church. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist Jesus draws the faithful into his "hour; " he shows us the bond that he willed to establish between himself and us, between his own person and the Church (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 14). According to Benedict, the Eucharist, which is union with Christ, has a profound impact on our social relations, because "union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own.

*Role of the Church: To comprehend God's ongoing revelation is why the Church is important at all ages. Benedict's view of the church, ecclesiology, places much emphasis on the Catholic Church and its institutions, as the instrument by which God's message manifests itself on Earth: a view of the Church's*

## Introduction to Theology

*universal worldwide role which tends to resist local pressure to submit to external social trends in specific countries or cultures.*

### *Major works:*

- *Theological Highlights of Vatican II.* New York: Paulist Press. 1966
- *Introduction to Christianity.* London: Burns & Oats. 1968
- *Faith and Future.* Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press. 1971
- *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God.* 1978.
- *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief.* 1983
- *Principles of Christian Morality.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1986
- *Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1986
- *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology.* 1987.
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000 [2000].
- *God and the World.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2002.
- *Jesus of Nazareth.* New York: Doubleday. 2007.
- *Light of the World: The Pope, The Church, and the Signs of the Times.* 2010.



## Chapter 10

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# Theologizing in the Indian Context<sup>1</sup>

In the land of Palestine, which is marked by inequality and injustice, Jesus proclaimed “the good news” to the poor and the downtrodden. The predicament and call of Jesus’ disciples in India is almost the same. We should know our country, our people and our problems if we want to bring the good news to them. As in Palestine at the time of Jesus, inequality and injustice are the key words to characterize the socio-economic and political realities of our country. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of health care are glaring realities. The vast majority of the people is affected by them, and still worse is the case if women, the Dalits

and the tribals, who are marginalized. We need a closer look at these realities and see how attempts were made to do theology in this context.

### **10.1. The Socio-Economic Scenario**

On the one side, our country has made tremendous industrial and economic progress in the last 70 years. India is the tenth most industrialized country in the world with in three decades. The GNP has grown, quality consumer goods are available everywhere, and have a rich middle class whose percentage has increased from 10% to about 30%. On the other side, poor people have become poorer and their number has increased. Among 174 countries, India's place is 128 from the point of view of social development (UN Human Development Report, 1997).

Reasons for this glaring contradiction are many. We followed a "Mixed Economy", which is a choice between socialism and capitalism. In this system, the capital-intensive heavy industry is undertaken by the Government with the taxpayers' money, and the production of profit-making consumer goods is in the hands of the private sector to their own huge profit. It resulted in the emergence of a rich middle class and the consequent widening gulf between the rich and the poor, causing greater inequalities. Though the caste system has been constitutionally and legally abolished, the system remains practically unchanged. Lower castes, including the dalits and tribals, are both socially and economically discriminated against. Most of the middle class people come from the upper castes, and thus there is a linkage between class and caste discrimination. Economic liberalization, free markets and globalization are the new factors for the widening split between the rich and the poor. The poor and the uneducated become unwanted and unemployed due to mechanisation and computerization. Globalisation, free market

and over consumption also lead to the exploitation of the natural resources and the consequent destruction of nature and pollution atmosphere, water and the whole environment.

## **10.2. The political situation**

In India we have a democratic government, elected by the people, and the government functions under a written Constitution. The Executive has to function in accordance with the Constitution and the laws made by the Legislature. If the Executive and the Legislature function against the provisions of the Constitution, the Judiciary will intervene and correct it. Thus we have a system of government with sufficient checks and balances. The Preamble to the Constitution of India declares that our country is a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic Republic and it will secure for all its citizens liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship. The word ‘secular ‘ does not mean neutral or against religion, Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees to all persons, not only the right to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice religion, but also the right to propagate one’s religion.

The secular character of our nation is today threatened by the Hindutva movement, started by some Hindu fundamentalist groups and Islamic extremists. The alarming thing is that several political parties have allied with the religious fundamentalist groups in order to win vote banks and gain political power and thus capture the government. The Hindutva is a very dangerous ideology which claims legitimacy exclusively for the majority religion, the Hindu religion, and to a monolithic culture, and calls for the creation of a Hindu Rashtra, where the minorities who belong to other religions and cultural traditions are caricatured as ‘foreigners’ and they are to be either eliminated or reduced to second class citizens.

Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, the harassment and persecution of religious minorities, the Ayodhya conflict, the attempts to rewrite the Construction of India and Indian history, the manipulation of our educational policies and rewriting of text books etc are not the only problems we are facing today. Coalition governments coupled with defection and split of political parties and consequent political instability, rampant corruption in the government and in the political parties, pro-rich policies of governments and the neglect of the poor and the marginalized, especially in the aftermath of globalization and liberal economic policies are serious problems in the political scene.

### **10.3. Discrimination against women**

Women in India do not get equal justice. On the contrary, they are discriminated by the male chauvinists. Women are subjected to unimaginable forms of violence and discrimination: female foeticide, infanticide, gender discrimination in education, food and health care, restriction of freedom in movement, forced marriages, wife battering, bride burning and dowry deaths, sexual abuse, rape, prostitution and denial of equal democratic rights. Half of the Indian population is women. And yet in the 13th parliament out of 543 members only 47 are women, that is, only about 8.5%. Yet when the women got a chance of 33% reservation in the local Panchayat elections according to the 73rd amendment of the Constitution, they proved their mettle by their committed action. Many women Panchayat Presidents became well known by their courageous action to meet the basic and essential needs of the people.

The case of dalit, tribal and backward class women is worse. The upper caste men treat them in an inhuman manner. Most of them are victims of the technological and computer revolution and that of globalization. They have lost their jobs and livelihood mainly

in agriculture, fishing, and cottage industries, as they are uneducated and unskilled workers. Will the Church and theological fraternity listen to the voice of Indian women and respond to their plight?

#### **10.4. The Cry of the Dalits, Tribals and Other Marginalized Groups**

Adivasis, Tribals and Dalits are part of the original indigenous people of India with their own history, traditions and religion. Among them the Dalits are the most humiliated lot. They are called by different names, untouchables, panchamas (fifth caste), chamdalas, scheduled castes, harijans, (the name given by Gandhiji) etc. As they are 'outcastes', they are thrown out of the residential areas of the four castes of the Hindu community and are treated with contempt as untouchables, and are segregated socially, religiously and culturally. Dalits and the tribals together form 22.5% of the total population. Most of the dalits are landless and economically very poor. Many of them are agricultural labourers or they do other menial jobs. The upper caste people dictate to them, control them and exploit them. The term 'Dalit' (from the root Dal which means 'to break', 'to cut', 'to oppress'), means 'the oppressed people', and became very popular with their liberation movement, started by Mahatma Jotirao Phule in the 19th century and Babasaheb Ambedkar in the 20th century. Today the Dalits are being organized and educated, and they are beginning to fight for their legitimate rights and equal justice. Some Dalits embraced Christianity in search of liberation, but unfortunately they are doubly discriminated, both by the State and the Church. The state denies them the rights and privileges given to the normal dalits because they embraced Christianity. In certain sections of the Church also they are still striving to get equal treatment and justice.

The scheduled Tribes constitute 8% of the total population. They are of two categories, frontier tribes and non-frontier tribes. The frontier tribes are the inhabitants of the North-East Frontier States, and the non-frontier tribes are distributed in the most of the other States. Most of the North-East tribes embraced Christianity before and after independence. In Central India also many tribals joined Christianity as part of mass movement in search of a new identity to fight against the oppressive forces and the feudal landlords. Many of the non-frontier tribals are today threatened as they have been uprooted from their habitats due to industry, mining, construction of dams, deforestation, lack of work and migration to the cities.

Of the four Hindu castes, the fourth caste is called sudras, and they are divided into innumerable sub castes or groups. Most of them are classified under the other scheduled classes (OBC). Their situation is equally “deplorable both socially and economically. Under our Constitution, the Dalits, Tribals and backward classes are offered several rights and privileges for education, employment and special quotas for seats in the electoral bodies of the government. These steps are meant to enhance their social and economic status. In the Bible we see that the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized people are the ‘beloved of God’ and those favoured by Christ. What is the special mission of the Church towards them? How should theology be oriented to their liberation?

### **10.5. Critique against a Purely Cultural, Philosophical and Religious Approach**

The earlier attempts of the pioneers of Indian theology were often along the line of a translation model. They tried mainly to translate the Christian doctrines and western theology into Indian cultural, philosophical and religious categories, so that they may be understood and received by the Indian mind. For this mostly they

had recourse to the religion, scriptures and philosophies of the upper layers of the Hindu caste order. However, the vast majority of the Indian people belong to the sudras, the lowest caste, the Dalits and the Tribals. The relevant question is, therefore, whom theology should address itself to.

Moreover, many other relevant questions are raised: Is theology merely wisdom, an esoteric knowledge, for another worldly and purely spiritual salvation? Has theology anything to do with the concrete socio-economic and political problems of the people and their concrete lives here and now? After the political independence, our country is now in the struggle for socio-economic freedom and development and for the building up of a welfare nation. Have Christ, his Gospel and the Church anything to contribute to the building up of our nation? Has the Gospel something to do with the socio-economic and political questions and problems of our people? Is the salvation proclaimed by Christ a purely otherworldly and spiritual reality? By all evidences of the New Testament and by what Christ did in his time, it is very clear that the salvation which Christ preached begins here, and it affects, reforms and renews radically the socio-economic and political structures of human lives and creates a new human society, based on justice, freedom and equality. Of course, it should be remembered that salvation transcends all these and even the socio-economic and political structures need a firm spiritual grounding for their own continuous renewal.

### **10.6. Christ and Our Search for New Humanity**

Many Indian theologians have begun to realize that the God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the Gospel contain answers and powerful resources for the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious questions and aspirations of the nation. They have seen a link between the Gospel of Christ and the social and religious

movements of the country. As very many Christians and missionaries began to be involved in the struggles of the people and to identify with the poor and the marginalized, they realized that they are proclaiming Christ in a new way and found the relevance of the Gospel for the country and for the lives of the people. Increasing number of Indian Christians and theologians realized that evangelization is much more than merely baptizing people and planting the Church. They saw evangelization as proclaiming God's love manifested in Christ calling for communion and humanization. Authentic humanization is at the same time divinization.

India's rich religious experience, our time-old tradition of harmony among the plurality of religions, the nation's resolve to construct a new society based on equal justice and freedom for all, and our strong commitment to eliminate poverty and misery, and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, all these are seen as constituent parts of the new humanity' given in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the prototype of the new humanity and the new creation. The Church's main task is to proclaim the arrival of the new humanity in Christ' and to be at its service. This new theological trend emphasized the hidden presence of Christ and His Spirit in all cultures and religions and in all human societies calling for communion and authentic human development or humanization. Christ is seen here not merely as the centre of the Church, but as the centre of the whole humankind and that of the whole creation. The transformation of human life and human societies in all its dimensions is the goal of the mission of the Church. It is not only the task of the Church and of the Christians, but also the task of all believers as well as of non-believers. Hence the Christian mission needs the collaboration and cooperation with the people of all religions and ideologies, and thus the necessity of dialogue. All these call for the redefining of Christian mission and a different style of missionary praxis.



The Protestant theologian Paul D. Devanandan (1901 - 1962) was, perhaps, the first Indian theologian who powerfully presented such a trend of thought, and identified the link between Christ and the search for 'new humanity' in India. For Devanandan, the Kingdom of God and the New Creation is not merely a transtemporal and purely spiritual reality, but a new reality that has erupted with the coming of Christ and something to be realized here and now, though not completely. M. M. Thomas, the lay theologian of the Mar Thoma Church followed the thought of Devanandan and he is, perhaps, the most articulate theologian who elaborated the links among Christ, salvation, humanization, Indian renaissance and modern secularity. Some other Indian theologians like, Raimundo Panikkar, John B. Chethimattam, and D. S. Amalorpavadass though their major approach to theology was from the cultural, philosophical and religious context of India, in their later works showed increasing interest in the human and secular problems and in development and humanization.

### **10.7. Indian Theology of Liberation**

South American Liberation theology emerged in the 1960s and 70s. Liberation theology is the attempt to discern the action of God in history and to collaborate with it by transforming the world. Here theology is not an intellectual pastime, but a praxis-oriented programme. It starts with the experience of poverty, misery, oppression and injustice and a new awareness that such human situations can be changed by the analysis and exposure of their root causes and consequently their elimination. The process is guided, strengthened and supported by the rereading and interpretation of the Word of God in the Bible and thus affirms our faith-commitment. Theology is here reconceived as a tool and service to our liberation struggles in view of creating a new society.

Almost parallel to the South American liberation theology, we can see similar theological developments in other Continents like Asia and Africa. We cannot, therefore, say that all Liberation theologies were directly influenced by the South American Liberation theology (See, M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, 1997). Among those who tried to articulate an Indian theology of liberation, three names are outstanding, Sebastian Kappen, Samuel Rayan and George M. Soares-Prabhu. The latter two are well-known Bible scholars, who tried to interpret the Word of God in the Bible from the actual Indian context. The poverty and misery of the people, the social problems like the caste system and the marginalization of Dalits, Tribals and women, and the basic religiosity of the Indian people were the context in which they made their biblical reflections and exegesis.

It is Sebastian Kappen, who made a unique contribution towards an Indian theology of liberation, critical study of Marxism, involvement in the lives and struggles of the marginalized people, constant interaction with the social activists, dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies and familiarity with the various streams of western philosophies and theology provided him with the necessary tools for the exploration and articulation of an Indian theology of liberation. His firm conviction was that all resources belonging to all religions, cultures, ideologies, sciences and technology are to be channeled and harnessed for the social transformation and humanization of our world. Kappen pointed out that an Indian theology of liberation would be unique as we have a religiously pluralistic context which calls for collaboration with the people of all faiths and ideologies and the adequate use of all their resources, and not merely Christian resources. A new Indian Christology or Jesusology is his starting point, where he introduced Christ and His prophetic protest in continuity with the history of socio-religious

movements of dissent, contestation and revolt in India, along the line of Buddha and the Bhakti tradition, in opposition to the sterile Brahmanic ritualism of Hinduism: hence the relevance of Jesus and the Gospel in our struggles for freedom and a new humanity.

### **10.8. Dalit Theology**

We have mentioned above that many Dalits in India embraced Christianity as a mass protest movement against the Hindu caste system by which they were oppressed and discriminated against. Christianity provided them a new identity. But the tragic thing is that even after becoming Christians; their situation did not improve much. Many Churches continued the caste discrimination. Therefore, the Dalit Christians were gradually alienated from their own Churches. As they adopted Christian faith, they also had lost their special privileges, rights, free education, reservation of jobs etc that their non-Christian counterparts enjoyed. Dalit Christians thus lost their identity and human dignity and they became non persons.

Dalit theology is the cry of the Dalit Christians by which they try to express their faith in the midst of their agonies. It is a Dalit version of liberation theology. Christian Dalits rejected the theology couched in the classical Indian philosophical and religious categories which are the language and perspective of the upper castes by which they wanted to maintain their superiority and to control all others. Instead, Dalit Christians began to discover their own history and their little traditions and to theologize in their own language and categories. There is an implicit theology of liberation underlying many of their myths, stories, poems, narratives, folklore and rituals. The Christian Dalits began to discover and develop their liberative meanings in the light of their faith-experience. The Crucified and Risen Jesus stood at the centre of their faith. It is the Crucified Jesus who gives meaning to their miserable and wretched life: it is the Crucified Jesus who

gives them the power both to suffer and to revolt. It is the Risen Jesus who gives them hope in the midst of hopelessness; hope in a new life and for a new world, which they dream. For Jesus, death was not the end, but the beginning of a new life already on the third day, and not at the end of history. Suffering and hope is, thus, the texture of Dalit theology.

Israel was an oppressed people, a Dalit group; and the Old Testament is the story of this Dalit people and the saga of their victory. God himself came to liberate them. The New Testament is the continuation of this story, the story of Jesus who was the leader and the prophet of the little ones of Israel, the oppressed and the marginalized. He was crucified by the powerful of society. But on the third day this Jesus was raised and glorified by God the Father. The Church at its origins was a Jesus Movement, the Movement of Jesus' People who were the community of the little ones, the poor and the oppressed to whom the mystery of Kingdom of God was revealed. Where do we find the God of the Bible today? Is He not with the Dalits? Yes, He is the God of the Dalits The Risen Lord Jesus is with his people, the little ones, the oppressed and the marginalized. The Dalits are the People of God and God wants their liberation.

### **10.9. Women's Voice in Indian Theology**

Theologies of the past and present are by and large the product of a male dominated society. Naturally these theologies express, more often unconsciously, the male perspectives, concerns and domination with the tragic consequence of the subordination, exploitation and oppression of women. In patriarchal societies and cultures women are often treated as commodities for men, simply to be used and abused. Theologies made exclusively by me a naturally one sided and to some extent distorted and they need the corrective

from a female perspective that theology may become more balanced and integral. If God created 'man' (homo human being) as male and female, they are constitutive and complementary parts of being 'human'. Man and woman, and consequently male and female perspectives are, left to themselves, incomplete, one-sided and liable to distortions. Hence they need to be related and complemented in order to be authentically and genuinely human. The experience of women, their perspectives, insights and intuitions are, therefore, indispensable for an authentic theology. The potentialities, talents and the possible contributions of women are unique and irreplaceable. Theology must be penetrated by the warmth, intuitions, and the sharing and caring nature of women.

Along with the principle of complementarity, the principle of equality must be also seriously taken. We are entering into an egalitarian society and culture where the equality of men and women is being accepted both in theory and practice. Equality of men and women in politics and in the socio-economic and cultural realm is already established in many countries. Women are half of the world population and of Church membership. How unfair and unjust to deny them equal partnership! What a tremendous loss if the resources and talents of half of the world population are not properly utilized or channeled but simply drained off!

There are a number of theologically trained women in India, and they have formed an organization too for mutual encouragement and support. But their voice is very feeble. Among the women theologians Vandana Mataji and Sara Grant have made some significant contributions from the Ashram-life point of view. Their writings are experience-based with a contemplative slant. They often call for a theology from the heart. There are indeed many theologically trained women who are social activists and who live among the

ordinary village folk, especially among the oppressed and marginalized women, and try to articulate the thoughts, insights, feelings and emotions of women. Indian theology is badly in need of more substantial contribution from the part of women.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This chapter is taken with the consent of Fr. Kuncheria Pathil from the book: Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, 2005. And, Kuncheria Pathil, "Theological Reflection on the Church from India," in *Asian Horizons*, (2012), 677-706.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Knowing God is nothing other than the beginning of loving Him. Theology enables one to know God more and more thus to be able to love Him ardently and adamantly. By studying theology, we understand who God is and how God is related to the world and humanity. It is a discipline like no other because it often brings together life, faith, thought, and study of the transcendent and immanent. The study of theology is not the same as a devotional study of the Bible. It encompasses interrelated sub-disciplines including Biblical Study, Church History, Systematic Theology, and Practical Theology. Therefore, studying theology is an adventure that is part discipline and part exploration. The following are the major and the basic texts that are to be used in theology: The Holy Bible; CIC – Code of Canon Law (Latin Code); CCEO – Eastern Code of Canon Law, Christian Faith, CCC. – Catechism of the Catholic Church, II Vatican Council’s Documents; FEF – Faith of the Early Fathers etc. To teach theology – to bring down the divine wisdom to the ordinary people is the vision and mission of Alpha Institute and this text is the beginning of this mission. It opens the doors to the amazing world of Catholic theology.

