

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: ITS FRAGMENTATION AND UNITY

The lamentation is a literary form of considerable antiquity. Absent from Egyptian literature, except in the isolated instance of a lover bemoaning the absence of his beloved, the lamentation attained distinct form in Mesopotamia and usually centered on the meaning of existence and what was behind the morrow's shadows. Strong religious belief, as Moscati indicates, nevertheless maintained the society in an equilibrium and harmony not seriously distorted by the inquietude lurking behind the bipolarity of all lamentation.

The biblical *Lamentations* over the fall of Jerusalem, somewhat darkened by their Greek translation of *threnoi*, maintain the dualistic orientations of all laments: a sense of loss accompanied by a beleaguered but pertinacious hope. This almost covenanted relationship seems to flourish more in poetry than prose. Depending on the writer and the times, tones of pessimism or meliorism may dominate. The popular Lewis Thomas, for instance, is a writer whose personal sense of wonder generates a sanguine view without at all concealing the harsh possibilities of the modern age.

THEOLOGIA

It is not unrealistic to suggest that Edward Farley's latest work,¹ while not palpably in the literary form of the lamentation, contains the characteristics of the lament: a spiritual inquietude, an unrest, a sense of loss attached to the uncertain hope that theology can once again become the "sapiential wisdom" it once was. Current theology retains little of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*. Rather does theology seem to be a series of voyages to bland, bleak, and unimaginative suburbs. As an aggregate of specialties, "theology as [a] disposition of soul to God disappears" (43). Once theology was produced by revelation, nourished by the Spirit, extended by study, and terminated in "sapiential wisdom," a force that permeated and motivated the entire person. Such sapiential knowledge was "engendered by grace and divine self-disclosure" (153).

Apart from other apparent cultural phenomena, theological education is moribund because the unifying rubric of *theologia* disappeared. Deterioration is manifest in the drift of theological training from its status as pious learning (the preseminary period) to specialized learning and finally to professional education. Originally *theologia* was an exercise of piety, a

¹ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

dimension of the life of faith, the basic source of hope, hardly distinct from charity.

Hyperius, in 1556, codified the fourfold division of theology into Bible, dogmatics, church history, and practical theology. The seed of specialized scholarship had been sown. The establishment of chairs of divinity in Edinburgh (1620 and 1694) and at Harvard (1721), followed by Yale (1755), was the initial movement away from *theologia* (though unsuspected at the time) as pious learning. Shortly after, by an irrepressible inherent logic influenced by the German universities, particularly that at Halle, a graduate component appeared. Andover, founded in 1808, was one of 22 such institutions established between 1800–1830. After 1850 the influence of Hyperius and German university education was pervasive. *Theologia* was a prisoner of events. It would be but a short step to conceiving the minister as a professional, one prepared to undertake certain tasks. Farley even suggests—and I think quite correctly—that the ladder of ecclesiastical promotions was not constructed by intellectual or even pious acquaintance with *theologia*. Promotion, if this is the proper name, occurs because of abilities that have only a remote connection with *theologia*.

PROBLEMS

Three distinct problems were apparent even in the relatively protected seminary period. First was the precise relation of theology and faith. Second was the institutional problem of creating educational establishments capable of furnishing a genuinely theological education, that is, one in which there was a unity of perspective and subject matter, one with an informing principle. Third was the problem of a theology which was not ruled by a pervasive *ratio studiorum*. (It would, of course, have been helpful if Farley had considered somewhat the Jesuit *Ratio studiorum*.)

Permeating this problematic and its debilitating atmosphere was the fragmentation of disciplines which made theological education almost a series of introductory courses. From the standpoint of one who was involved in revising an entire university arts program, this is not a problem peculiar to theological education. But superficiality and psychic dispersion undermined motivation for difficult theological study (15). The inevitable, if modern, outcome is that one currently entering a seminary can be virtually illiterate. So it is not surprising that the ministry is not attracting talented people. The remedy: a reform of content, pattern, and the articulation of a goal for theological study.

THE THREE PHASES

Theology has gone through three phases. In the early Christian centuries theology was knowledge of God. The Middle Ages to the Enlighten-

ment retained this disposition of the soul in which theology was knowledge of God which led to salvation, a *cultura animi*, a *habitus*. But during this period there was a subtle passage from *sacra pagina*, where you might say the knowledge of God was much more immediate, to *sacra doctrina*, a teaching about God, a transit from *lectio* to *quaestio*, theology as "an Aristotelian university science" (38). From the Enlightenment to the present the dominant meaning of theology has been systematic theology.

The norms for theology as a discipline were the *articuli fidei* (41). Theology as knowledge of God gradually yields to theology which is knowledge about God. The unitary principle of this latter state is "pertinence to the tasks of ministry" (43). Thus theology became strategic, a *Kunstlehre*, a technology, quite close to what could be called catechetics. Thus did theology move from a divine illumination of the mind to a cognitive habit, a technical, pragmatic discipline.

Despite this, theology survives, but "in a form of idiosyncratic aspects of the curriculum, something available for certain kinds of students and certain kinds of ministers" (44). In short, Farley agrees with Gerhard Ebeling's statement, "Das Theologiestudium ist von einer Orientierungskrise befallen."²

OBSERVATIONS

Prof. Farley admits his intention to write a work that is tendentious. The real outcome, however, is evocative. I think the careful reader will find his or her reactions so numerous that the problem is to formulate a coherent and concise reaction to what is not only a stimulating but a very honest book.

Theological education now faces the same problems that university education has been encountering. But the sheer weight of the university apparatus and its undeniable successes here and there confer an acceptance not readily available to theology. The bureaucratic structure and vested interests not only of the public but of faculties and departments have a momentum of their own. This community of concern is an issue that can only be mentioned here; and we cannot delay on the more common problems shared by the humanities and theology. But Farley's allusions to law and medicine as fields that do seem to possess clear presuppositions, methods, and goals has not been a part of my own experience with these disciplines. Extensive contact with members of both professions suggests simply that their skills are far more apparent and necessary in the present social structure, their results more palpable, and, in the case of residents at least, their working hours longer than

² Gerhard Ebeling, *Studium der Theologie: Eine enzyklopädische Orientierung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1975) 1.

those of most apprentice theologians. I doubt that theology can look to either medicine or law for the reform envisaged by Farley. It is, I suppose, a truism to note that institutional teaching and research is characterized by two groups: those who actually move learning and research forward and those who maintain something like the *status quo* and profit from the forward motion of the first group. Something similar prevails in theological education.

BACKGROUND

Each religious community has a series of axial myths, that is, stories generating convictions around which the life of the community revolves. These myths have a centrifugal and centripetal force. By what Northrop Frye calls the principle of exclusion, the theological community excludes certain elements from its axial structure. Gnosticism, Montanism, and forms of subordinationism were early Latin Christian examples. The centripetal force absorbs into its axis elements which the society, for one or another reason, values, finds congenial and congruent to the total mythology, and later canonizes as orthodox. So Latin Christianity, for example, absorbed a curial structure. This was not simply the result of early Christianity's early Roman location, but also because of the Pauline emphasis on one body, a metaphor that was canonized and subsequently institutionalized by Ignatius of Antioch.

The Eastern Churches, however, excluded a jurisdictional primacy. While according a primacy of honor to Rome, early Eastern Christianity held firmly to the pentarchy, the ancient counterpart of modern collegiality. Simultaneously, Byzantium absorbed a typological mentality in which Byzantium was to be an icon of the heavenly Jerusalem. While the emperor was the vicegerent of God, church and state were part of one organism. *Sacerdotium* and *imperium*, ideally at least, constituted one organism, thus reinterpreting the Pauline metaphor. The Latin reaction to this in the person of Cardinal Humbert and his two legates sent by Pope Leo in 1054 is well known. So, too, is the slaughter of Latin residents in Byzantium in 1182. By the 13th century very diverse centripetal and centrifugal forces had made the division between East and West complete. While scholasticism prevailed in the West, the patristic atmosphere dominated in the East. While the emphasis on *Deus in se* flourished in the West, the *Deus pro nobis* obtained in the East. Very divergent centrifugal and centripetal forces within the same phenomenon that we call Christianity led to the loss of a common universe of discourse.

At the same time a quite different type of Christianity flourished among the Celts, particularly in Ireland. From the legendary figures of Patrick, Sts. Enda, Finian, and Brigid, through the founders of monasteries, to the travelers Brendan, St. Columba, and St. Columbanus, Celtic

Christianity assumed contours startlingly different from Latin and Greek Christianity. Despite the difficulty of accurate historical reconstruction, we do know, not merely from legends but from archeological data, that the monastic communities were small, really local churches. The lover of austerity, poetry, isolation, and a very evident tolerance, perhaps inherited from an earlier paganism, gave Celtic Christianity a form that was different not only from European Christianity but even from English Christianity. The reforms of Pope Gregory I left Ireland untouched. This insular status lasted until 1142, when an outside force acted centripetally and established the first Cistercian monastery and a very direct relationship with Rome. The centrifugal force of Celtic mythology was no match for Adrian IV and Henry II, not to mention the Viking raids. All of these factors succeeded in eliminating a highly unique form of Christianity.

This very sketchy historical excursus intends only to recall to the reader's mind the diversity of forms which Christianity assumed and consequently the multifarious modes of theology and theological education. Any consideration of *theologia* must face this larger horizon, which may be helpful in resolving the present problematic. While Christianity and Christian theology assumed unique contours in Ireland, Byzantium and Greek theology, though perhaps not quite so austere, shaped an apophatic theology which stressed the divine transcendence and the way of quiet. Any consideration of theological education and its reform would not suffer a loss by careful consideration of the above examples. One might even suggest that the *theologia*, the sapiential wisdom of which Farley wistfully speaks, is here tangibly resident in the compelling imaginative visions which once preserved a vanishing knowledge.

INNER LIGHT

Common to the three spiritual quests is the search for a spiritual inner light, what Aquinas called the *lumen intelligibile et interius* elevating the mind to perceive what the normal mind could not perceive. This is quite parallel to Amos Wilder's description of apocalyptic, which sought to describe veiled powers, buried hierophanies. Similarly writes Paul Minear of the apocalyptic dimension of Christianity: "In its broadest sense, the word apocalyptic designates the disclosure through human agents of God's presence and activity, which otherwise would remain hidden from the people."³ This consensus indicates that the subject matter of theology is this spiritual inner light in its experiential origins and in its shapes of diffusion. The values accorded to the mediators of this inner spiritual light vary according to individual and societal preferences, temperament, training, tradition, culture, and the levels of symbolic expression available

³ Paul S. Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) 15.

within particular cultures. If one is to speak of theological education, a word about the mediators of religious tradition is not out of place.

THE MEDIATORS OF RELIGIOUS MEANING

The subject matter of religious tradition is mediated by five generic categories of symbolic expression. First, there is a body of literature, either oral or written. This corpus may be accepted as constitutive, that is, normative or foundational, or as consequent, that is, literature or oral interpretation emerging after and from the foundational literature. Lines of distinction here are not as clear as frequently made out, even when, where appropriate, an official authority closes a canon. Second, there is the mediation of religion through visual art forms such as painting, sculpture, and architecture. Third, there is the aural art form, usually some type of sacred music. The music may stand alone or be accompanied by the dance or other form of mimetic activity. Fourth, religion is mediated through historical formulation of some sort, distinct from the literature. This may include correspondence, protocols, popular forms of devotion, religious attire and gesture, the development of institutions in the formal sense and monumental remains of any of the above. Finally, each religion maintains itself by theological formulations which may be present in the story, the song, popular wisdom, the legend, the saga, or the more systematized theorems that could not be classified as literature but are rather modes of systematically transmitting doctrine of some sort. These are the protectors of the axial myths. For each of these mediators there is an appropriate cognitive and imaginative operation. It would seem, therefore, that suitable theological education should concern itself with transmitting the operations congruent to the subject matter, a point I have elsewhere discussed. This obviously indicates that Wilder was quite correct in asserting that "our critical repertoire must be widened."⁴

Religions and their theologies realistically accord varying degrees of esteem and honor to the various mediators of the spiritual inner light. Theological curricula, apart from whatever process of spiritual formation accompanies, permeates, or merely surrounds the theological instruction, are affected reticences. Bach's Christology may be either too difficult or considered a mere artistic appendage to more solid doctrine. Joachim of Fiore may be thought either too visionary or too intractable; Sts. Enda and Finian, too shrouded in legends. St. Theresa's *Interior Castle* may be too filled with metaphors. Hence the handbooks and mélanges of introductions of which Farley correctly complains.

⁴ Amos N. Wilder, *The New Voice* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) 23.

STYLE

Attitudes, dispositions of mind, and inherited procedures coalesce to produce a particular theological style. Here one can do no better than recall Kroeber's definition of style: "A historical style can be defined as the co-ordinated pattern of interrelations of individual expressions or executions in the same medium or art."⁵ A style is a reasonably congruent, coherent, persistent pattern of performing certain activities. A seminarian, for example, could reasonably well predict the form, content, and procedures he or she would be expected to absorb. Minor variations of style—attempts to be relevant or pertinent are mainly confirmations of the staying power of the style itself—are found in the minor changes made in theological curricula, the moves made from suburb to city or vice versa. The minor variations indicate the monumental dimensions of any reform; for revisions in curricula are generally proposed by insiders, those intimately involved in an old style, those who teach and react according to the canons intrinsic to the old style.

Like all genuine reforms, styles are altered when they cannot effectively cope with new realities, when they cannot extend their range of control, when they fail to attain new qualitative achievements. This inherent senectitude of an old style proves incapable of introducing progressively increased differentiations in individual and communal consciousness. I therefore do not think that specialization or fragmentation of disciplines is the cause of theology's current and hopefully temporary disorientation. Rather, the style—whether it be the Hyperian legacy of Bible, systematic theology, church history, and practical theology or the Catholic tractate system, and both Protestant and Catholic stress on technological courses for religious leaders—is incapable of facing new realities and therefore clearly faces two options: disintegration (the first part of Farley's book) or reconstitution (what he calls reform).

I would hope that theology is capable of reconstitution. I would hope, too, that theology would draw on its very diversified resources rather than remain within its European and North American matrix. I would hope, moreover, that Christian theology would pay direct and less condescending attention to the spiritual inner light sought for in the classic world religions.

What I have earlier called the lamentation is an impetus to reconstitution and a new theological style; for the lament is composed of two elements: what once was (or was supposed to have been) and what can or might be. The point of productive lamentations is to unleash creative impulses, to generate different ways of seeing, to lead to a new vision, to

⁵ John Edward Sullivan, *Prophets of the West: An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) 25.

add to what as yet does not exist, to move from what we currently are to what we might be. The task of theological training is to provide the student with the critical and imaginative equipment to move into the future, to rearrange dramatically old frames of perception, and thus to change what is. Theology, therefore, is a kind of magic which proposes an imaginative vision of the future. Theology proposes that the human being and the community be something more than they currently are. Practical implementation of such a program obviously demands artistic imagination, the essential role of which is, as Thomas Martland has said, to raid the inarticulate. I would think that while Dionysius and Apollo should coexist, the impulse to reconstitution lies currently with Dionysius.

CONCLUSION

Like the creative lamentation, theological reminiscence is grounded on memory and hope: the remembrance, however vague and shadowy, that someone experienced a hierophany; the hope, however dim, nonetheless permeated with desire, that the hierophany may be transmitted in comprehensible terms and perhaps even recur. This memory and hope acknowledges and yet challenges Proust's note that the only paradises are lost paradises. However implicitly, Farley is suggesting that the purpose of the truly human life is to search for what was lost. In the words of Ignatius Loyola, "to find God in all things," a spiritual perspective that is perhaps less directly theological than Luther's injunction that theology be both *explication* and *application*. It is the *application*, I would think, that will give *theologia* the spiritual authority it currently lacks.

Such a perspective recommends that we distinguish the theological impulse from theological criticism. The theological impulse pervades any capacity for genuine spiritual experience. The theological impulse resides more in vision and in imagination than in doctrine or history. It is an impulse, however elusive, that forms part of the historical process and at the same time shapes its own history. This theological impulse is present in all the mediators of religious tradition. It can even be disguised into secular transformations such as Marxism.

Theological criticism—and this is what can be taught—is the effort to reconstruct the primordial spiritual experience, the original hierophany, the one that we should have had. Theological criticism attempts to give tractable form to the theological impulse; it begins with knowledge *about* and can put the student in the position to reach knowledge *of*. Thus theological criticism begins with one tradition and the theological impulse mediated in that tradition. Explicitly theological criticism considers the transcendent in that tradition, while implicitly allowing that the transcendent may be manifest in other traditions and forms. Theological

criticism begins with exoteric symbolism, the elementary univocal forms. Gradually the motion is to esoteric symbolism, the reality to which the symbols point. In this education procedure, which takes place currently in a pluralistic environment, there is a latent but persistent problematic: as an impulse, the *theologia* of which Farley writes is universal. If the subject matter of this *theologia* is the inner light and what it enables us to see, then the subject matter is universal both extensively and intensively, each of which aspects causes its own theological problems into which we cannot now enter. The extensive universality of the theological impulse resides in the historical evidence indicating its presence in all human beings. The intensive universality consists of the tyrannical claims, as Auerbach speaking of the Bible has described it, that the inner light exercises on the entire person—not simply on his or her mind, heart, and will but in all his or her behavioral patterns.

This extensive and intensive universality makes the teaching of *theologia*, not to mention the arrangement of a curriculum, extraordinarily difficult; for focal awareness (to use Polanyi's language) can comprehend only discrete items, one thing at a time. But subsidiary awareness is more comprehensive. Here we can only propose that if one reads writers such as Bultmann, Frye, Ricoeur, A. Wilder, and Lonergan—to stay with moderns—there is an apparent and gradual transition from focal awareness on systematics to focal awareness on imaginative vision. That this transition seems to be the outcome of age and protracted study is a banal biological affirmation. Rather is there a rise from exoteric to esoteric symbolism, a development from elementary meaning to the force of the meaning, a spiraling procedure in which the naive continually evolves into the critical, the subsidiarily present becomes focally active, knowledge *about* seems to become knowledge *of*. This is certainly reminiscent of what Augustine called wisdom. More by way of fugal allusions, Farley opens up a broader horizon than he perhaps intended.

While it would be naive indeed to domesticate totally the theological impulse, it is safe to say that theological education is an intellectual, imaginative, moral, and social procedure which should produce increasingly differentiated states of spiritual consciousness. Thus, combining hope and memory, can one look to the reconstitution of what Farley calls *theologia* and to the resurgence of its spiritual authority.

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