

NOTE

SIGNPOSTS TOWARDS A PASTORAL THEOLOGY

The aftermath of Vatican II has seen two significant developments in the Catholic theological enterprise, at least in the North American context, that are rich with both possibility and challenge. The first is the shift in its "location." Prior to the Council, Catholic theology was taught almost exclusively in seminaries restricted to the preparation of men for the priesthood. Subsequent to Vatican II, graduate programs in both theology and pastoral ministry have proliferated in university settings, attracting a wide variety of students, both clergy and laity.

This "sociological" shift has accompanied and contributed to a second shift that might be called "methodological." It is associated with the "turn to the subject" that theologians like Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan initiated in contemporary Catholic theology. They insist that the theological task requires theologians to attend explicitly not only to the Scripture and tradition of the Christian community, but also to the life and mind, the context and interests, of the persons doing theology. Thus Lonergan places reflection upon conversion at the very foundations of the theological enterprise. And the working theologian receives no personal exemption from the requirements of conversion.¹

An epochal consequence of this second shift is that Catholic theologians are newly and carefully attentive to "human experience" and "historical praxis" as vital sources for theology.² Here the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican II played a pathbreaking role. One recalls that *Gaudium et spes* is entirely the creation of the Council, having no antecedents in the preparatory documents distributed to the bishops. Moreover, its full title, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in

¹ For the importance and legitimacy of this "anthropocentric turn" in Catholic theology, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology," in *Faithful Witness: Foundations of Theology for Today's Church*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan and T. Howland Sanks (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 14–26. For a suggestive attempt to develop Lonergan's insights on conversion into a foundational theology, see Stephen Happel and James J. Walter, *Conversion and Discipleship: A Christian Foundation for Ethics and Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

² Initial, yet discriminating comments on "experience" can be found in Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1981) 5–27. A brief history of traditional and contemporary usages of "praxis" is given in Dermot A. Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theory* (New York: Paulist, 1984) chaps. 2–3.

the Modern World," signaled a unique development in conciliar history. Here we have a constitution that is, by design, primarily "pastoral": not in opposition to "dogmatic," but as accenting the pastoral intent and implications of dogma itself.³ Finally, *Gaudium et spes* issued an explicit call to scrutinize the "signs of the times" in order to discern their significance for faith and theology; thus it promoted the methodological shift noted above.

No wonder, then, that many movements in contemporary theology, and especially the various theologies of liberation, look upon this Pastoral Constitution as their Magna Carta,⁴ as they pursue a theological reflection that pays careful heed to the social and historical contexts in which Christians are called to live out the full responsibilities of their faith. They speak of "reading the signs of the times in light of the Gospel and the Gospel in light of the signs of the times." In this they reflect an approach to theology that David Tracy formally designates as "mutually critical correlation."⁵

These methodological developments seem also to herald a significant adjustment in how the curriculum of theological education is organized. The Protestant seminary curriculum has typically followed Schleiermacher's fourfold division of theology into Bible, history, systematics, and then a cluster of subdisciplines identified as "practical" (sometimes "applied") theology.⁶ In this schema, the relationship be-

³ For an early and seminal study of the originality of a "pastoral constitution," see Karl Rahner, "On the Theological Problems Entailed in a Pastoral Constitution," in *Theological Investigations* 10 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973) 293-317.

⁴ Note the discussion of *Gaudium et spes* in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973) 168-72.

⁵ For a recent and highly nuanced discussion, see David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconciled: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *TS* 50 (1989) 548-70.

⁶ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* (Richmond: John Knox, 1966). Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) reviews the history of theology as a discipline, and argues convincingly that for its first and well into its second millennium, theology was both a personal disposition (*habitus*) of the theologian and a "self-conscious scholarly enterprise" (31). A person so trained in *theologia*, as Farley calls it, had the capacity to "do theology" in a pastoral context with the intent of pastoral and spiritual wisdom. Farley unfolds the story of *theologia*, and details a number of shifts that resulted in the demise of theology as a practical *habitus* for Christian wisdom to become, instead, a fragmented collection of subdisciplines pursued with theoretical and "scientific" interests. In sum, "this shift is from theology viewed as a *habitus*, or act of practical knowledge having the primary character of wisdom, to theology used as a generic term for a cluster of disciplines" (81).

tween the first three and the fourth was construed, as Edward Farley notes, as a movement "from source to application."⁷

The Catholic seminary curriculum was less neat than Schleiermacher's fourfold division; yet it too had a collection of what were considered core subdisciplines (systematics or dogma, ethics or moral, Bible, church history, etc.). Then, more at the periphery of the curriculum, were positioned some studies designed to enhance the "pastoral art" of the future priest and often grouped together as "pastoral theology." This latter was the preferred Catholic term (and, from our perspective, is a more adequate term than "practical"); but it often served as something of a "catch-all" category to cover such disparate undertakings as sacramental celebration, homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral counseling.

The common outcome for both Protestant and Catholic theological education was similar: "pastoral theology" was that subdivision that "delivered" the findings of the other subdivisions to a community or congregation that itself had relatively little to contribute, but was the passive recipient of these ministrations. Pastoral theology, so conceived, contained little theological substance of its own.

Several implications of this traditional understanding and arrangement should be noted, since they are pertinent to our argument. First, the areas grouped under the designation "pastoral theology" were often considered merely the *application* of the principles gleaned in such substantive fields as Bible, systematics, and history. Second, pastoral theology was consequently often deemed a less demanding, less rigorous, indeed a less serious undertaking, relegated to part-time personnel teaching at odd hours. Thirdly, the various courses loosely grouped under the heading "pastoral theology" lacked any clear and cogent integrative vision; they seemed joined only in a marriage of administrative convenience. Lastly, the supposedly "substantive" subdisciplines were thereby "let off the hook": they could remand "pastoral" questions to these other courses, while claiming for themselves an objective status uncontaminated by the pressure of contemporary concerns. In sum, in this model of theological education, pastoral theology, in its various incarnations, was construed as the "delivery system" for what its elder and more prestigious theological siblings had independently established.

⁷ See Farley, *Theologia* 135. For an illuminating survey of the historical divorce between the "theoretical" and "practical" functions of theology and some of the contemporary insights and sensitivities promoting a reintegration, see Randy L. Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," *TS* 51 (1990) 650-72.

Clearly, much about this arrangement is quite questionable, and the present intense discussion concerning pastoral theology has highlighted some of the major deficiencies. We might mention the following. As both the sociology of knowledge and contemporary hermeneutics affirm, the relation between "theory" and "practice" (or the oft-favored "praxis") is much more intimate and reciprocal than an understanding of practice as "applied theory" allows. On the one hand, not only is theory interpretive and illuminative of practice, but it also proceeds from practical interests and commitments, perspectives and biases; and it should, in a system of mutual checks and balances, continue to be informed and reformed by its historical realization. On the other hand, practice itself is "theory-laden," and, if it is to be truly reflective and critical, the theoretical principles and social assumptions that guide it need to be lifted out, scrutinized, and critiqued.⁸

In addition, contemporary historical consciousness recognizes that the narratives, doctrines, and dogmas of the past only receive adequate appreciation and understanding when interpreted within the context in which they were originally formulated. To read them without due regard for their concrete particularity is to misread them. Hence theological theories and viewpoints do not exist in some timeless heaven (as a misuse of Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* might suggest); theories and viewpoints themselves arise within a determinate historical setting as a result, in part, of the ecclesial community's reflection on its own pastoral life and practice.

Finally, the salvific and profoundly dialogic intent intrinsic to the entire theological enterprise cannot be relegated to one subdiscipline called "pastoral theology" but must permeate the entire undertaking. Indeed precisely this intent characterizes the classic texts of the theological tradition whose very *raison d'être* is to communicate glad tidings, the gospel of salvation, in particular times and places, and thus to elicit from people a lived commitment of Christian faith. To prescind from this intent at any point in the enterprise is to violate the plain purpose of the texts and doctrines themselves.

Nonetheless, as long as pastoral theology, however inadequately construed, remained within the ambit of seminary or divinity school, a certain cross-fertilization among the theological disciplines ensued from their inclusion in a common curriculum and within a setting dedicated to preparing people for careers in ministry. The same students were engaged in each of the areas and many did manage to

⁸ See Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) esp. chap. 3, for a review of the paradigmatic shift toward a dialectical unity between praxis and theory in theological method.

weave connections. These connections, moreover, were reinforced by participation in daily liturgical celebrations where Scripture, theological reflection, homilizing, and spiritual counseling could conspire in evocative fashion. Finally, the professors of the various disciplines were most often themselves active ministers of the Church, exercising pastoral responsibility. For them, theology "disconnected" from the life of the Church made no sense.

Consequently the present situation, in which the location of the theological enterprise is shifting from seminary to university, portends both possibility and danger. With regard to pastoral theology the crisis it confronts might signal not renewal but further isolation, since it may now lose the common and, at times, supportive context which seminary provided, without gaining a true integration with the other theological disciplines. Seeking academic respectability, pastoral theology may only sunder its ecclesial moorings; and pursuing its legitimate conversation with the relevant social sciences, it may lose touch with its theological foundations. On the other hand, this moment also holds the possibility of new life for all of theology: both a renewed pastoral theology and a more adequate understanding and appreciation of the relationship among the various theological subdisciplines.

Accordingly we suggest that the foundational issue we confront concerns, in the first instance, not "pastoral theology," but the very nature of the theological enterprise itself. Putting the matter in its bluntest form, we might ask: Can there be a Christian theology that is not a *pastoral* theology? If we truly undertake to do theology, then pastoral intent and purpose are ingredient to its integral realization; otherwise we are engaging in the study of religion only as an interesting human phenomenon, without the compelling claims to truth, convictional knowing, and commitment that *theology* implies.

For the faith vision and narrative which biblical exegesis and systematic theology elucidate and interpret do not aim at merely detached contemplation, but at active engagement and transformative action. To "know" the God of the Bible and the Christian tradition demands not merely "notional apprehension" (in Cardinal Newman's phrase), but that "real apprehension" in which mind and heart, theory and practice are wed.⁹ At the center of the Christian texts which theo-

⁹ For the importance of the notional/real distinction, so central to Newman's argument in *A Grammar of Assent*, see Ian Ker, *The Achievement of John Henry Newman* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1990) chap. 2. Ker asserts: "the famous notional/real distinction, which is at the heart of Newman's phenomenology, stems from a philosophy of mind which takes account not only of the logical or ratiocinative intellect but also of the imagination" (69). And, still more integrally: "Rather than opposing faith and reason,

gians expound, stands the ineluctable call to conversion of life: the New Testament's *metanoia*. Theologians can hardly "bracket" this as they pursue the theological task.

A clear implication of this persuasion is the renewed appreciation that theology and spirituality are two aspects of one integral whole, as had certainly been the case throughout the patristic period. This patristic integration of the quest for both understanding and wisdom was not often evident in the division of the theological curriculum in typical Roman Catholic seminaries during most of this century. There spirituality was clearly extracurricular. The patristic sense (retrieved by many of the great theologians whose labors prepared the way for Vatican II) is that spirituality lies, rather, at the heart of the curriculum itself. As the French Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu has written: "A theology worthy of the name is a spirituality which has found rational instruments adequate to its religious experience."¹⁰ Given this conviction, it comes as no surprise that Chenu was passionate in his advocacy of a theology whose pastoral nature flowed from its historical engagement with God's Word of salvation, a Word that has not fallen silent, but speaks today. Chenu's vision providentially prevailed at Vatican II, most especially in *Dei Verbum* and *Gaudium et spes*.

God's salvific Word, of course, transcends doctrines and precepts. It is fulfilled and becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ. As Gustavo Gutiérrez, a student of Chenu, has declared with splendid simplicity: "I believe in Jesus Christ, not in the theology of liberation."¹¹ This Christic substance provides Christian theology with its unique center and focus; indeed, with its distinctive identity. Moreover, the person of Jesus Christ, whom faith and theology encounter, is not some historical reconstruction, but the living Lord of history, who calls to discipleship and transformation in the one history of humanity with God. As Chenu insisted, theology's reflection (in both its doctrinal and pastoral dimensions) concerns persons far more than propositions: the

[Newman's] achievement was to redefine faith in terms of a wider concept of reasoning than had been current since the seventeenth century. As in his educational theory, so in his philosophy he is concerned with the whole mind, not just the narrowly logical faculty. Similarly, he is also anxious to integrate the intellectual with the moral dimension" (42).

¹⁰ See Chenu's masterful study, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1985). The quotation is found at pages 148–49; we give it in an unpublished translation by Joseph A. Komonchak. For a splendid statement of the need to transcend the tired disjunction between "doctrinal" and "pastoral" theology, see the essay, "Un concile pastoral," in M.-D. Chenu, *L'Evangile dans le temps* (Paris: Cerf, 1964) 655–72.

¹¹ "Interview with Gustavo Gutiérrez," *Maryknoll Magazine* 80 (November 1986) 19.

person of Christ and, inseparably, those called to be renewed in Christ's image.¹²

But this, assuredly, entails Church: for Church is the sphere in which Christ most explicitly lives and reigns, in which worship and witness in the name of Jesus transpire. A theology for which Jesus Christ is the living heart of the tradition, the One whom the tradition communicates from generation to generation, must be, by that very fact, an *ecclesial* theology. Whatever be the particular place in which theology is undertaken—seminary, university, base Christian community—its proper placement is within the believing community of disciples, and its proper concern is the life of the Church in the world and, hence, the life of the world, to which the Church must be, in the words of Vatican II, “universal sacrament of salvation.”

Thus all theology is pastoral theology insofar as it is animated and sustained by such an ecclesial vision and passion. Though theologians certainly have responsibilities toward their colleagues in the theological community, their primary responsibility is to the life of the Church. Theologians discharge this responsibility by reflectively clarifying Christian identity and the implications of Christian discipleship in history. Within Catholic Christianity such an undertaking evidently requires a close and mutually respectful collaboration between theologians and the Church's hierarchical magisterium so that the building up of the Church and service to the world may be most fully and effectively realized.

Furthermore, Christian identity and the call to action that is intrinsic to it are enacted liturgically before being reflected upon theologically. In the Catholic vision the Church's essential “sacramentality” comes to fullest expression in the Eucharist. Here the Bible becomes Scripture within the confessing community; and the community celebrates its origin from and ongoing dependence upon its Lord, crucified and risen, and receives its mission to go forth in his name. Thus theology's privileged source, the wellspring of its encounter with the living Christ, is liturgical and sacramental. In the pastoral theological vision of Vatican II, “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows.”¹³ All theology, therefore, is pastoral to the

¹² Thus he writes: “[L]a Parole de Dieu émane de la personne de l'Homme-Dieu. L'Eglise donne au monde non seulement une doctrine, mais Jésus-Christ vivant” (*L'Évangile dans le temps* 662).

¹³ “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” no. 10, in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966) 142. For an impressive effort to

extent that it is nourished and nurtured by the body of Christ within the body of Christ. Absent such existential nurturing, it becomes a purportedly "scientific" study of religion; and the theologian's speech about God remains, perforce, "indirect," reduced to reporting the assertions of others.

Emphasizing the pastoral dimension of all Christian theology by no means precludes the recognition that a particular subdiscipline of the one theological enterprise may be legitimately called "pastoral theology." Up to this point we have stressed the *unity* of the theological task, especially in view of the more centrifugal tendencies endemic to the university's insistence upon academic specialization. We turn now to consider how one might helpfully characterize the subdiscipline of pastoral theology. And we suggest that it is marked by a self-conscious perspective, by an explicit concern, and by a particular sensitivity.

The *self-conscious perspective* of pastoral theology is the contemporary life of the Church, the living out of Christian faith in today's world. Already a different vantage from that of biblical or historical or systematic theology may appear. We certainly have no desire to claim exclusivity. Many students of the Bible envisage their task as being not merely the exegesis of biblical texts, but their interpretation and explanation in dialogue with the contemporary situation. And systematicians clearly seek to mediate between the tradition's past and its present. But the pastoral theologian self-consciously *begins* with the contemporary life of the Church in the world and appropriates the past of the tradition from this vantage point. Thus he or she stands within the theological community as a concrete witness to the pastoral concern of the entire theological enterprise, and as a concrete resource toward the achievement of its pastoral goals.

We might further specify this perspective by suggesting the *explicit concern* that animates pastoral theology. It is nothing other than the formation of a community for transformation according to the pattern of God's salvific reign realized in Jesus Christ. This is the foundational "praxis" around which all the other pastoral practices of the Church cohere—whether preaching, religious education, social action, or administration. Such Christocentric praxis is anything but privatistic or parochial. It seeks to shape the lives of Christians on every level of their existence—personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical by proclaiming and celebrating the personal Center in whom all things hold

place Christian worship at the heart of systematic theological reflection, see Frans Josef van Beeck, *God Encountered 1: Understanding the Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) esp. chap. 7: "Doxology: the Mystery of Intimacy and Awe."

together (Colossians 1:17) and offering a vision of the ultimate at-onement and recapitulation of all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), the full realization of the reign of God (1 Corinthians 15:28).¹⁴

It is pertinent to recall here the importance in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, with its recovery of the ancient practice of the catechumenate, and the imaginative impact this is having upon pastoral activities of all kinds. Hence we suggest that a primary concern of pastoral theology regards the ongoing ecclesial catechumenate: the many ways, informal and formal, whereby each day "the Church gives birth to the Church"—that concrete and multifarious "traditioning" which is the handing on of the faith from generation to generation. What makes the RCIA so versatile a model is that it clearly engages the whole community of the baptized along with the catechumens. Indeed, the whole of Christian life becomes in deed as well as word an ongoing apprenticeship in discipleship.

This concern is inseparably linked with another: namely, to analyze and discern the present situation in society and culture within which the ecclesial catechumenate must be contextualized and the life of discipleship realized. What is the concrete context within which the texts of the tradition, with their challenge and promise, are to be read and lived out? What hindrances and helps, both individual and social, to transformation in Jesus Christ does a given culture offer? Hence pastoral theology's concern extends to the "catechumenate of the culture" with its values and disvalues—a catechumenate which, in the present climate, shaped and misshaped by the compelling images of television and cinema, is often much more potent and influential than any catechumenate the Church has managed to muster.

One may sum up this explicit concern of pastoral theology by remarking that the conversion which is at the center of Christian life never occurs *sub specie aeternitatis*, but always in a determinate situation that demands specific renunciations and adherences. "Pastoral theology" thus seeks to inform, form, and help to transform this praxis of the Church in the world. One outcome of this sensitivity could well be to promote a new integration between liturgical and social consciousness, between the express concerns of *Gaudium et spes* and those

¹⁴ A Christocentric vision and praxis is articulated, from a Protestant perspective, by James W. Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives," in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 148–66. See also his recent *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

of *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy), an integration the Council itself failed to achieve.¹⁵

If such be the discipline's ecclesial passion and commitment, it must cultivate a *particular sensitivity* regarding dialogue and the conditions that foster genuine communication. This special sensitivity we might describe as a nuanced appreciation for "language," understood inclusively as embracing environment, music, and gesture as well as speech and writing. For it is the imaginative and tensive use of language that helps promote the passage from notional to real apprehension and assent, as well as from monologue to conversation and dialogue. Hence the pastoral theologian is sensitive to the crucial importance of image and symbol as well as concept. He or she is cognizant that the logic of theology must always be embodied in story so that it may shape vision and empower praxis effectively and affectively.¹⁶

If, as we have suggested, every theologian working within the Christian tradition bears a responsibility to the whole community for articulating the meaning and implications of Christian identity, pastoral theologians serve to embody and actualize that responsibility and concern within the theological community as a whole. And since Christian identity includes "agency," since disciples are called to be doers of the Word and not only hearers, the challenges and demands of action are thus made concretely present to the whole theological enterprise, which, especially in the university setting, could all too easily fall into a purely academic posture and procedure (in the invidious sense of the word "academic").

In a real sense every minister within the Church serves as a "pastoral theologian." The preacher, for example, who proclaims and elucidates *this* text of Scripture within *this* determinate ecclesial and societal context is engaged in pastoral theology of a particularly demanding sort. So too the catechist, the pastoral counselor, the social-justice minister. In a more specific sense, however, the pastoral theologian's "place" is that of mediator between the work of the specialists in Bible and history, systematics and ethics, and those engaged in full-time pastoral ministry within the Church.

¹⁵ See Mark Searle's judgement: "*Gaudium et spes* failed even to mention the church's sacramental and liturgical life. This omission meant that a sense of the intrinsic link between liturgy and social action, so characteristic of the American liturgical movement, was largely lost in the post-conciliar period" ("Renewing the Liturgy—Again," *Commonweal* 115 [November 18, 1988] 619).

¹⁶ Ian Ker remarks, apropos of Newman: "The whole theory of real assent demands that there should be notional concepts so vividly realized as to become facts in the imagination, that is, in Newman's terminology, images" (*The Achievement of John Henry Newman* 60).

In this latter sense the pastoral theologian shares in systematic theology's legitimate concern to probe foundational issues, to insure comprehensiveness of vision, and to raise valid speculative questions. On the other hand, he or she also represents the ministerial passion concerning the existential import of the gospel, a keen sensitivity to and dialogue with the concrete contemporary situation, and the desire for effective communication. Indeed, in the present North American context of theology's shift to the university, the pastoral theologian may well be the primary facilitator of the delicate but crucial conversation between academy and Church, culture and gospel.

If pastoral theology was misconceived in the past as "applied theory," pastoral theologians today strive to elucidate the mutual interplay of theory and praxis. They are becoming skilled dialecticians of the theory/practice relation. But they do so as Christian *theologians*, in service to the past, present, and future of the Church's tradition and practice; convinced that, at the end of the day, whatever the importance of penultimate issues, the ultimate theological examination concerns the practice of the faith. Thus, though highly appreciative of the indispensable role of theory, pastoral theologians know that the gospel's drama of redemption is salvific action. Their watchword could well be the epigram Newman chose as preface to his classic *Grammar of Assent*: "Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum: It was not through dialectics that God was pleased to save God's people!"

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