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## NEW PARADIGMS FOR AN INTEGRAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TODAY

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### Abstract

Theology is basically a God-talk and as far as Christianity is concerned it is an intellectual endeavour carried out on the basis of faith since faith is the first step for all theologizing activities. The text and contexts are significant factors in this respect and therefore, we have many schools of theology in the Church. From Apostolic Fathers to contextual theologies of the contemporary phenomena there have been tremendous changes taken place in the focus of theology itself. Today theology needs to address matters not in terms of apologetic context and intellectual jargons of the West but as a critical confrontation. We all try to present Jesus as *Christus solutio omnium difficultum*, Christ is the solution for every problem. In this endower we can adopt two methodologies. Firstly, theology may be concerned with the clearly defined set of doctrines handed down by the apostles. Here theologians and even faithful have only passive role. On the contrary a second model would be concerned with God's self-gift to his people which they experience and communicate in various ways through symbols, rituals, creeds, doctrines and praxis. Here all have a positive role to play. In this article we rely upon the second model theologizing with their implications since theology is basically theological anthropology.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Methodologies, Praxis, Theological Education, Triple Immersion

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## **Introduction**

By and large theology is mainly concerned with God and thereby the existence of religions as the very word suggests namely, *theo, logos*; science about God. Some religions speak about the personal God and some others propose impersonal God. Whatever it may be the concepts, the point of reference is the Ultimate cause of everything, a reality for meaning of life. Theology is not neither a leisure time enterprise nor a hobby. It is an attempt to make the Christian an integrated person. Therefore it is important to ponder upon the nature and contexts of theologization. For whom we need to theologize? Equally important is the text and context of our endeavor. Also do we consider the history seriously? Do science, economics and politics become the subject matter of our theologizing?

### **1. Need of Conceptual Shift in the Definitions and Praxis of Theology**

On the basis of different polarities in theologization inherent in that, there evolved different definitions. The question today is whether we are stuck in the classical definitions even though each one has its own merits. Modern theologians debate on them for newer understanding of theology.

#### **1.1. Western Approach**

The West and the East have varied forms of expressions to share their experience of the Ultimate Reality through definitions. Firstly, the Classical definition of Anselm is universally used and is well known to all: *fides quaerens intellectum*, (Faith seeking understanding). As the meaning is self-explanatory, it suggests that by theological endeavours Christian faith tries to understand the categories in terms of reason. In other words with the support of reason theology wants to explain faith. But theology is neither confined to syllogisms nor is it an activity of intellect, nor and investigation on God but a search for a God who revealed himself in history of humankind through His words and deeds. Ultimately it is an act of faith rather than an intellectual act. Faith is the be-all and end-all of theology. Therefore, what theology demands is the practice of faith carried out in the living experiences of people. Hence we have the dictum; I believe in order to understand. Too much focus on the rational or intellectual aspect of scholastics confined theology in the university curriculum ignoring the spiritual elevation involved in it. There is the danger of the compartmentalization of spirituality and theology. In the present scenario of theological education in seminaries, there is a huge gulf

between the two. On the other hand we should not miss the point that rational method has helped the faith from the danger of falling into superstitions and dogmatism by articulations and critical activity. It strikes a balance between *fidelism* and *rationalism*.<sup>1</sup> However, in general terms we are forced to say on the basis of this definition that scholastic theology is a stagnant one since theology is not imparting knowledge about a set of truths which are intact and ready-made. God's grace is primordial factor and it should assist us in all our endeavours to give proper response to God's revelation and gift.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Eastern Approach

Secondly, there is considerable difference in Eastern approach to theology. The kernel (*locus theologicus*) of the Eastern theology was in invitation to anchor our theologization on the Scripture which is being fostered and expressed in liturgical life.<sup>3</sup> Therefore in nutshell, it is Scriptural, Patristic and Liturgical in nature. It is very much expressed in the dictum, *lex orandi, lex credenti*. A paraphrase would be law of worship is the law of believing. Liturgy is the heart of theology since the incarnational Christ event is proclaimed, celebrated and actualized in the liturgy. It demands a sort of mystical, contemplative, experiential and meditative way of life<sup>4</sup> rather than intellectual gymnastics. This method as well shall be a matter of subject in our critical investigation. In fact, liturgy and sacraments mediate our faith experience. They are the product of our faith experience and are not the other way around. Even liturgy necessitates strong theological foundation lest there is the danger of superstitions and pale emotionalism.<sup>5</sup> It is in this context we need to understand the Vatican II exhortation of liturgy as the source and summit of Christian life. The genesis of liturgy tells us that liturgical traditions are formed in particular cultural and historical contexts and they should be termed as perennial and unchangeable ways of worship. That is precisely the reason behind the call for the renewal of liturgy from the part of ignited minds and thus we have today a number of liturgical renewal centres.

Therefore, the liturgical theology should be considered as a mediator to impart authentic Christ experience. Today the question

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<sup>1</sup>K. Pathil and D. Veliath, ed., *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2003, 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17.

<sup>4</sup>Pathil and Veliath, ed., *An Introduction to Theology*, 13.

<sup>5</sup>Pathil and Veliath, eds., *An Introduction to Theology*, 14.

arises whether our liturgies are the celebration of that faith experience which was the core of apostolic time onwards. Then only liturgy as *locus theologicus* would flourish and would become a vital factor in the ecclesial life. This calls for transcendence, even beyond liturgical texts or rubrics or set of rules. Any overemphasis in this line ignoring its faith experience pays way for superstitions and even goes to the extent of mechanized view of worship.

### 1.3. Emergence of a New Methodology

In the postmodern arena, there is always a call for new methodologies with regard to theologization. A close look at the history of theology gives an idea of a steady process as far as methodology is concerned. Reformers emerged as a result of a speculative philosophical theology. But they ended up in *sola scriptura*. During time of scholasticism or medieval period the Church was preoccupied with defending the perennial truths of Catholic faith. Consequently, any subsequent efforts with the Church to describe the perennial truths in non-scholastic terms were considered as heretical departure from the normative truth of revelation. A new critical- historical understanding in theology emerged with the advent of Vatican II.<sup>6</sup> There was always a tug of war on the focus of human thinking between the individual and society. Romanticism, Existentialism, Capitalism, Socialism and Marxism were champions and they asserted human experience on the one hand and the role of society at the expense of individual on the other. This has been migrated into theological realm as well and we have liberation theology and political theology emphasizing society over the individual.<sup>7</sup>

As a consequence of these developments a new way of looking at theology was emerged. Everything under the Sun was brought under the purview of theology including God, world, and humankind. On the basis of historical consciousness and on the importance of human nature a theology from below began to emerge in parallel terms and complement to theology from above. The long forgotten human experience became conspicuous in theological endeavours. Consequently today we need to theologize in terms of anthropological categories. Thus we have many definitions focusing on anthropocentric theology. At the same time it does not in any way

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<sup>6</sup>J. Patharapankal, "Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of God," in P. Kochappilly, *Contextual Ecclesial Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, Bangalore: Darmaram Publication, 35.

<sup>7</sup>Pathil and Veliath, ed., *An Introduction to Theology*, 15.

contradict or oppose the theocentric sphere. They are to be viewed as two sides of the same coin.<sup>8</sup> According to Prof. Saumel Rayan, the first step of methodology for theology is to acquire a comprehensive and scientific analysis of the existing reality. We need to discern where God is present and what God is doing in our history so that we may become channels of transformation of the society. For him “Word of God and our faith response to it must be seen as partners in dialogue with the actual socio-political context. The Text and the historical context must be made to interact critically and creatively.”<sup>9</sup> In other words the Bible has to be read from the text and context of the people and through their eyes of suffering, struggles and aspirations. There should be dialogue between the biblical and socio-political context. Our faith impels us and moves our sense of justice. Thus theological orientation and education becomes a recurring event of pilgrimage according to the change of situation and each time calls for new avenues of hope, courage, prayer and action.

#### 1.4. The New Anthropological Shift

In its core as well human being is not one among different theologies. In all theological endeavours human being is the pertinent issue and even revelation of salvation is all about the salvation of humankind. The classical understanding of human dignity in GS is of a language of relationality of humankind, with God, human being and the cosmos. Therefore all theology cannot be understood without human being’s existential and transcendental openness.

In terms of definition, today we have different definitions of theology. Dharmaram theologians and philosophers come up with new reflections to explore and expand insights in depth. “Theology is faith seeking harmony of life” (Bishop Jonas Thaliyath). “Theology is faith seeking sharing of Christian life” (Dr Varghese Pathikulangara). “Theology is faith seeking integration of Life” (Dr Thomas Aykara).<sup>10</sup> From these definitions we infer that from the part of Indian theologians there have been attempts to see theology beyond faith seeking knowledge. As far as India is concerned we need to be concerned with our commitment to the prospects and problems which a majority of masses face in our times irrespective of caste, colour and creed. This calls for an anthropocentric theology and its

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<sup>8</sup>Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. IX, trans., London: Longmann and Todd, 28.

<sup>9</sup>Samuel Rayan, “Theological education in the Social Context of India Today,” in Felix Wilfred ed., *Theological Education in India Today*, Bangalore: ATC, 1985, 26-28.

<sup>10</sup>Paulachan Kochappilly, ed., “CMI Ecclesiastical Education,” in *Contextual Ecclesial Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, 24.

praxis. Here it has to be made clear that even the theological statements have to be formulated and connected to our own human self-understanding as all the more expressed in our experience. Only then we can conceive of a relevant and meaningful theology. Therefore we have the Rahnerian dictum, theology is basically theological anthropology.

## 2. Critical Reflection and Orthopraxis

As we have mentioned earlier, theology had various focuses in the earlier centuries such as the meditation on the scriptures and their hermeneutics. It was in fact a spiritualistic concern for perfection, devotion and contemplation. It is a valid endeavour and one of the permanent characteristics of theology. However, modern theological reflections tried their best to translate theory into praxis. This was the methodology practiced by the Liberation Theologians. Therefore according to them theology is a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word of God.<sup>11</sup> According to GS it becomes imperative from the part of the Church that she should involve in the social, political, and cultural movements of the time by reading the signs of the times. According to Chenu this has served “as a source of its inspiration and guided its progress.” GS says “to carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”<sup>12</sup> The criticism made against this term was that it was more of a sociological term. But the deeper meaning would be, to see God’s action in present-day history the Church reads the signs of the times. The Church is to be at the service of the Kingdom and of the world as well. Again, as GS would opine, the Church should give witness to Christ by living the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of humankind of this age (GS, 1).<sup>13</sup> Thus Christian faith entails a call for praxis and commitment for the transformation of this world.

It is necessitated by critical reflection. Critical reflection means how concrete life of faith is critically evaluated in every sphere of life on the basis of the light of the Word of God. Theology should open its horizon to answer real questions and issues of human life. It calls for a total humanization of the world by concrete pastoral action. It challenges Christians for radical and ardent commitment to make this world a better place for all people. This is known as the ‘already’

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<sup>11</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, New York: SCM Press, 1974, 6-15.

<sup>12</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

<sup>13</sup>Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

aspect of the Kingdom of God; in the oft quoted phrase of Bonhoeffer, world is the penultimate of the ultimate.<sup>14</sup>

### **3. New Trajectories of Theological Education Today**

Having said this let us delve into some of the new trajectories of theological education in the present scenario.

#### **3.1. A Critic of the Present Seminary Formation**

Today it is imperative that we need to conceive theology from vantage point of new horizons. That theology is neither a matter of class room gymnastics, nor any arm chair systemization is all the more conceivable. Many theologians observe that one of the major problems for theological education in our country is that theological education is substantially connected with the training for the priesthood. People are ordained priests but they never become spiritual leaders of the community. It has almost become like a career. Very many a time it is not the struggling to live a meaningful Christian life that initiate the process, but rather the only concern is studying theology for the sake of becoming a priest. It seems that the syllabus offered in the curriculum is often viewed as irrelevant for the students. Therefore, there should be a paradigm shift from priesthood directed theology to a Christian praxis directed theology.<sup>15</sup>

Another important area that calls for attention is the obstacles that pay way against our commitment. There is a huge gulf between our seminarians and the world. It is surprising to note that the rest of their life after becoming the priest is a struggle to bridge the gap between the same. The candidates are taken out of the world and accommodated into a huge institution as if like a cocoon, making a wall of security around them freeing them from all kinds of anxiety and hardships and cultivating their own life style orienting for clerical culture. They are not able to listen to the real voice of God who is in the world especially in the market place, in streets, in homes, in slums, in schools, in colleges, etc. God challenges us in different ways. The immediate consequence is uncommitted seminarians in heart. Prof. Pathil, responding to Sebastian Kappen compares the encounter of God with conceiving a bomb which has to explode in actions that transforms and renews

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<sup>14</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Bethge, New York: Macmillian Company, 1955, 127.

<sup>15</sup>J. Josantony, "Theologizing in Seminaries: A Questionable Enterprise," in Felix Wilfred, ed., *Theological Education in India Today*, 93-94.

the society.<sup>16</sup> We need to go beyond confirmation of certificates for the theological studies. There is a craving for obtaining certificate from secular universities for theological studies. It is very hard to give certificate for personal and private experiences. It is all the more hard to give certificate for encounter with God and for faith commitment. Secular way of looking at the curriculum can actually degrading value of priority of theological endeavour.

### **3.2. Theology as a Way of Life**

According to Prof. Amaladoss, one of the greatest theologians of our times, an authentic theology should be “integrated with the life of the community.” The be-all and end-all of theology is life itself. It must be born of life and lead back to life. Theology is the reflection of experience and this very experience is evaluated in the context of faith. Real questions must be raised looking for meaning purpose, motivation and relevance of life. The basic questions that theology asks are the human tragedy of pain and death, love and justice, fellowship and freedom and world and God. He emphasizes it by saying that,

Theological reflection is the continuing effort to find meaning in life. Rooted in the here-and-now experience of history it re-interprets the memory of faith as living hope... the process of theologizing is sparked off by questions that arise from an experienced tension between faith and life.<sup>17</sup>

What is our theology and faith? Theology asks the decisive question about the existence of God. But today the crucial question is not atheism. Our enterprise should present and share a God who is with humanity. The omniscient and omnipotent nature of God in ontological terms (God’s- Self) shall not be the immediate subject matter of our theological reflection, on the contrary we need to present a living and loving God when human dignity is at stake, and the poor, women, minority are subjected to holocaust. The theological question is with whom God is sided. The classical definition of faith is our committed response to God’s revelation. We respond to God by “yessing” ourselves wholly to God. This response is done in history and on earth. Therefore, our commitment entails all historical concerns, tasks, involvement and relationship. Any faith commitment is all the more a commitment to God’s project in creation and in history. What necessitates is our collaboration with God in bringing creation to completion in history. To sum up, faith which orients and

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<sup>16</sup>K. Pathil, “Rethinking Theological Education in India: New Models and Alternatives: A Discussion with Sebastian Kappan,” *Jeevadhara* 14 (1984) 285.

<sup>17</sup>Amaladoss, “Theological Education in the Modern Age,” in Felix Wilfred ed., *Theological Education in India Today*, 77.



conveys us to God also directs us to the world, to history and to people. This historical-human aspect of faith is called in the NT as the love for the neighbour. To have faith in God is to be in love relationship with people.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.3. Theology for Transformation: A Doing Theology

From above considerations we gather that commitment to social transformation in terms of acquiring a truly human world is an inevitable factor for any theological endeavour. Faith demands our commitment to the Kingdom of God in terms of concerted effort for the well-being and the transformation of the society. It includes spiritual, economic, political religio-cultural fabric and situation of the people. Otherwise what we can expect is only an idealistic theology. Theology in terms of *theandric praxis* for the transformation of the society was the main concern of Indian theologians after Vatican II. Committed attentiveness to what happens to people around, their struggle, their tears and their hopes and the search for the Kingdom message have become the focal point for theologizing. In fact this was the method of Jesus himself for the transformation of his situation around, which was the result of his deep immersion into human world.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, theology should not be conceived as an armchair theology in purely academic realm. This implies that theologizing should aim not only at the transformation of the individual Christians or that the reform of the Church, but also at the transformation of the whole world into the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom centred theology is the need of the hour. The Kingdom will be realized on Earth when the whole humankind will be able to live together as a community based on kingdom values, namely, love, justice, peace, equality and harmony. It calls for a doing theology and a contextualized theology. As far as India is concerned, theology should cater to the needs of India's socio-cultural environment that is characterized by poverty and religious pluralism.

### 3.4. Triple Immersion by FABC

#### 3.4.1. *Dialogue with the Cultures*

In a way it can be said that theology is man's language about God in a cultural expression of his experience of God. Every experience and expression is culturally conditioned. The conditioning has substantial influence upon people; their customs, traditions,

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<sup>18</sup>Rayan, "Theological Education in the Social Context of India Today," 14-16.

<sup>19</sup>Felix Wilfred, *Beyond the Settled Foundation*, Madras: Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, 1993, 150.

literatures, thought patterns, imageries, symbols and signs. Therefore culture is a base for theological reflections. Theology has to be developed in the context of actual life situation of a people and not to be fabricated in the classroom atmosphere. The only sincere motive for inculturation is to make the Word of God intelligible to the people in their own words. Only in and through cultural symbols the divine experience can be articulated. It also demands theologian's personal life participation in the living experience of people's culture. He needs to be a sharer in the struggles of the people, a prophet to suffer for people, a guide to lead the people amidst all kinds of misfortunes.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.4.2. *Dialogue with the Religions*

Dialogue with the other is a prerequisite for theological formation today, especially in India. Theology of dialogue and collaboration with others should be a necessary aspect of theological formation today. *Nostrae Aetate* teaches:

the Church exhorts her sons that through dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things spiritual and moral as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.<sup>21</sup>

Here it is reiterated that the Church is open in her attitude to other religions and accepts the values of our common heritage despite many diversities of experience and expression. For that matter the first step shall be the respect and self-consciousness of one's own heritage. Abhishiktanda opined that one should practice *epoche* (Bracketing one's own faith categories) for fruitful dialogue. On the other hand Raimundo Panikkar criticized this view saying that in the later stages it might be counterproductive. *Ecclesia in Asia* accepts profound religious values of other religions such as "love for silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, respect for life..."<sup>22</sup> etc. Therefore act of dialogue is a means for people in different faiths to find together a common endeavour to experience the Divine prayerfully. Thus all religions become means to show paths to this divine centre.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Manickam, "Theological Education in the Cultural, Philosophical Contexts of India Today," in Felix Wilfred ed., *Theological Education in India Today*, 55-56.

<sup>21</sup>Vatican II, *NA*, 2.

<sup>22</sup>John Paul II, *EA*, 6.

<sup>23</sup>Thottakkara, "Inter-religious Dialogue in India: Challenges and Chances: Views of Prof. John Britto Chethimattam," in Paulachan Kochappilly, *Contextual Ecclesial Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, 86-88.

Our theology should not be an alienating ground for the Christians against the Hindu or Muslim or Sikh brethren. Our seminaries and theological centres should be congenial places for breeding a dialogical theology where the relevance of the variety of religious experience is respected and thereby the communal harmony and collaboration for better community is established. *Humanum* or the real human fellowships are aspired by linking and consolidating divergent faith content and forces of faith. We need to find out a common language about God. The shared content of faith with all commitment will give answer to the common problems of the people. Accordingly our theology will not be dogmatic but praxis oriented (pragmatic).<sup>24</sup> Dialogical approach between religions is necessary so that the differences do not emerge as obstacles for happy living and co-existence. Dialogue becomes a theological pilgrimage for the Christians in India.

### 3.4.3. *Dialogue with the Poor*

Our commitment to social transformation leads us to the option for the victims of the system. It becomes an imperative to be committed for the liberation of the oppressed. Commitment to the poor and taking their side should be the basis and starting point of theological reflection and theological education. Theology and dialogue should promote positive human dignity, human rights and human values. According to FABC, poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, superstitions and injustice, etc. are not Christian or Hindu or Muslim problems but human problems. People of good will should fight against these evils.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.4.4 *Implications*

As far as Indian theology is concerned in the present scenario there is a strong trend in the pursuit of dialogue with other religions, cultures and the poor. Dialogue is a welcome process of mutual enrichment and better understanding of each other. Good number of theologians considers that for attaining justice Christians should join hands with the people of other religions. Here we can identify two phenomena as particularly urgent today: a) a profound concern with the many poor in the world; b) the problem of many religions. Theologies addressing these trends are the most creative theologies today. The vast majority of the world's population struggles against

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<sup>24</sup>Manickam, "Theological Education in the Cultural, Philosophical Contexts of India Today," 59-60.

<sup>25</sup>FABC Documents, "Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Inter-religious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," Sukabumi, 1-7 July, 1988, 317-324.

poverty. Theologians are called upon to channelize the energies of all religions to create a world for the well-being of all people.<sup>26</sup> We all try to present Christ as the solution for every problem. Therefore Christians have to commit themselves to an open dialogue with other religions and cultures in India.

### **Conclusion**

Theological education is a dynamic and an ongoing process. In this endeavour it is worthwhile to consider the role of the Church. On the basis of faith content it educates the faithful, builds up the Kingdom of God on earth by means of collaborating with people around, irrespective of caste and creed and religious diversities. New creation is the motive. We need to have an integral worldview and we should be very loyal to our own faith and societal experience. An Anthropological turn in every reflection is going to be decisive as far as the methodology is concerned. We need to interpret socio-cultural institutions, rituals, and socio-political institutions, etc. for the liberation of the society. Theology becomes vibrant insofar as it questions and answers and gears to the problems of the society on the basis of faith. Is it a wild dream? To my mind theology is not a set of ideas or a science about opinions but the fellowship of many confluences of things. Living fellowship of theologians is equally important. They need to live in present dreaming of the establishment of the Kingdom of God of future.

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<sup>26</sup>Thomas Kochuthara, *Dialogue and Liberation: Theology between Local and Global*, New Delhi: Inter-Cultural Publication, 1999, 189-192.