

Topic 24: Theology and Spirituality: Theology as "Love Seeking Understanding"

I. Theology as "Love Seeking Understanding" Historical consciousness involves a profound consciousness of historical suffering. In the face of this, Christian theology must; Confront suffering; Determine its fundamental form and Ask what can be done about it. If the major form of suffering in today's world is historical suffering unjustly inflicted on some by others, the theology must make that suffering the theological place from which it begins its reflections. What is at stake in this world of suffering is the humanity of human beings, the faith of Christians, and the credibility/ relevance of theology.

The choice to do theology from the "place" of suffering is an option prior to theology which faith itself requires. The construction of a theology, like any human act, necessarily occurs within a particular context which one implicitly or explicitly chooses. Hence, before one can do theology, one has to first be situated in a specific place, which involves making a prior option to look at the truth of things. This principle from Christian spirituality functions as a *sine qua non* for Christian theology.

In the presence of a suffering world, one's primary reaction is that of a compassion that aims to eliminate such suffering. As reflection on this action, theology functions as "*intellectus amoris*," love seeking understanding. Suffering confronts human beings with a choice. The choice to react to suffering with compassion is intrinsically humanizing, but the truth of this claim cannot be proven from outside the interpreted experience of it (i.e. outside the hermeneutical circle). The construction of a theology constitutes a human praxis. The task of theology involves not only knowing but doing God's Will (i.e. to love and save this world.) In this way theology is salvific not only in the contents which it offers (soteriology) but in its very task.

The practice of love and justice leads to faith: theology as active love initiates one into the mystery of Christian faith (*mystagogy*). Realized faith (*intellectus fidei*) does not merely study love and its final revelation, but seeks to initiate an integral, faith-hope-love relationship with God. Realized hope (*intellectus spei*) represents the unconditional, trusting openness to what is salvific, new, unexpected, unable to be manipulated. Realized love (*intellectus amoris*) operates within reality in order to save it.

II. Spirituality as Discipleship: At the most basic level, to "have a spirituality" is to "be a human being." The question is not, Should I adopt a spirituality? but, What

spirituality should I adopt? This parallels the logic that sees the central problem of faith as idolatry, not atheism. The issue is thus to articulate a spirituality in accord with an objectively true anthropology.

The reality and mystery of God becomes present in concrete historical reality. Hence, transcendence is transcendence in historical reality. Hence, "responding to reality" involves an experience of and a response to God, regardless of whether this remains implicit or becomes explicit.

Theological Dimensions of Spirituality: Honesty with the Real assumes that the truth of concrete reality exerts a claim on us. Positively, this means respecting the truth of reality. Negatively, it means overcoming the temptation to evade or twist the truth of reality to suit our own vested interests. We respond to concrete reality with mercy, "that in terms of which all dimensions of the human being acquire meaning and without which nothing else attains to human status" (Sobrino, 682). The primacy of mercy corresponds to the primacy of the suffering of the other (negative experience of contrast).

Fidelity to the Real involves an active, expectant hope. Put differently, it is love and hope in action. It enables reality to achieve its fullness, to correspond to the Reign of God. This active discipleship seeks to affect reality (practical dimension) but is always willing to suffer and bear the sin of the world (paschal dimension).

Being Led By the "More" of the Real; concrete reality, burdened by sin and suffering, is at the same time permeated by grace. Reality itself points us in the right direction and gives us the strength to walk. It not only makes demands, but offers opportunities and help as well. The structure of reality is gracious and calls for a response of gratitude and gratuity.

III. Christian Discipleship and the Option for the Poor: Christian spirituality engages the real in the concrete manner of Jesus and according to the spirit of Jesus. Put simply, Christian spirituality is Christian discipleship, the following of Jesus (who is not only "truly human" but "the true human.") The option for the poor is the historicization of Christian discipleship today, just as Jesus is the historicization (i.e., sacrament) of God's option for the poor.

The holiness of poverty: The logic of incarnation is the logic of descent, of self-emptying, or what Sobrino calls the holiness of poverty: "it means a sharing in the history of that concrete reality in which the God who is holy, ever distant, and beyond us, becomes the God who is near, hidden but present, in the poor"

(Sobrino).

The holiness of love: The structure of Jesus' life is mission, an activity or praxis which aims at changing reality, converting historical reality into the Reign of God. Words, signs, and praxis are the concrete form that Jesus' mission takes. They enunciate, by making it concrete, the fundamental principle of the Christian life: love. Living with spirit is thus action - a doing from love and with love.

The holiness of compassionate suffering: The political holiness of the cross (persecution and martyrdom) represents the cost of discipleship. Holiness appears as political holiness, that is, holiness lived in the human polis. Martyrdom is the most integral form of this political holiness. "The spirituality of martyrdom, then, is nothing other than love for a world of victims" (Sobrino).

The holiness of joy: We live the fullness of resurrection life now by following Jesus and incarnating the spirit of Jesus. This discipleship has as its clearest sign the hopefulness and freedom that spring from joy. When one encounters "fullness under historical conditions," one experiences that presence of transcendence that we name resurrection.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the "theological place from which theology begins its reflections"?
2. How can you create holiness in your daily life?