

RENEWING COLLEGE THEOLOGY PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines provides the occasion and the incentive for a critical review of our catechetical ministry, and for the theology programs in our Catholic colleges. Many future catechists are drawn from the graduates of Catholic colleges, while an increasing number of Catholic colleges are offering degree programs in Religious Education. Thus it seems appropriate to examine our college Theology programs for possible renewal and strengthening, particularly in view of PCP II and the recently concluded National Catechetical Year.

We shall first present a brief general rationale for a College Theology Program under three major headings: its nature and purpose, its basic content, and its methodology. This will serve as the basis for the modest proposal for updating and revision.

I. RATIONALE FOR A COLLEGE THEOLOGY PROGRAM

A. BASIC NATURE AND PURPOSE

If we ask quite simply: "What is the *nature* of COLLEGE THEOLOGY?," our response is first to distinguish it from the academic/professional Theology of the graduate school or seminary levels. The *nature of college* Theology must be seen as an integral part of Christian humanistic education at the *college* level.¹

1. This position is grounded in "Theology in a Filipino Catholic University," *Philippine Studies* 33 (1985) 39-66.

College Theology, then, is that type of critical study of Christian revelation, contextualized in today's Filipino local setting and cultural environment, that directly contributes to the goals of Philippine Catholic college education. This is usually sketched, in some form or other, in terms of "*academic excellence, social awareness, and spiritual development.*" A fuller description would involve the following characteristics:

a) *Filipino*: an effort at inculturated, contextualized education; courses in Filipino, Filipino values, etc.

b) *Catholic*: explicitly Catholic in content and animated by the Catholic educational tradition.

c) stress on "*core curriculum*" — especially philosophy and Theology, while developing major programs in the principal disciplines: business, the physical and social sciences, computer science, etc.

d) *social concern and service* to the larger community; following the Social Doctrine of the Church, and especially the resolutions of PCP II.

e) developing the *Campus Ministry* in fostering the spiritual development of the students.

Given these current basic thrusts for Catholic education in general, what, then, is the specific *function* of the *college Theology program*? Again the response is that its *function* is NOT to produce professional theologians nor pastors of the flock, but to educate college students toward THEIR own "*maturity in Christian Faith*" as Filipino lay members of the local Catholic Church.²

These general *goals* of the Catholic college can be specified in greater detail for the Theology program by outlining the key Christian humanistic skills which Theology aims to develop. The needed practical skills for the maturing Catholic Christian are the ability to:

a) understand, interpret and "*pray*" the *Scriptures* as members of the Filipino Catholic community;

b) understand and properly interpret *Church teaching* (e.g. the

2. See *Maturing in Christian Faith*. National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines [NCDP] (Pasay: St. Paul Publications, 1985) nos. 77-78, drawing on John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican, 1979) no. 5.

CBCP letters) and the Catholic doctrinal tradition (the Creed);

c) habitually make *moral decisions* in the light of the Catholic moral vision and virtues, both personal and in the social Filipino context;

d) develop a sound *Catholic spiritual life* through frequent reception of the sacraments, personal prayer, and a "sense of belonging" in the Filipino Catholic community [parish].

This is one way of spelling out in greater detail what the college Theology program is designed to foster, namely, a Christian graduate who is intellectually competent, morally educated, and spiritually formed — precisely as a disciple of Jesus Christ in the Filipino Catholic community.

B. CONTENT OF THE THEOLOGY PROGRAM

Course Structure. A preliminary question concerns what kind of course structure would best accomplish the function and goal of the Theology program as described above. Most Catholic colleges opt for a series of required courses arranged in a definite sequence and order, for the purpose of presenting, in a progressive, integral, and holistic manner, the Christian message for today's college Filipino Catholic.

Actual Course Content. College Theology programs are generally arranged to correspond both to the students' natural level of interest, sophistication and growth, and to the nature of Theology as an academic discipline. A typical first year course treats on a college level the fundamental realities of Revelation, Faith, and a critical contemporary theological presentation of Jesus Christ. A course on the Church flows naturally from this ground, followed perhaps by an inter-disciplinary course in Christian Marriage or Vocation. Various courses in Christian Morality, especially Christian Social Teaching, and Christian Spirituality, attempt to bring together and further contextualize in our Philippine situation, the preceding courses while adding significant new matter, and employing a more intellectually demanding methodology.

Moreover since each Theology course draws on Sacred Scripture, the Theology program hopefully allows for a more in-depth, critical study of the Bible, while at the same time

exemplifying the integrated use of Scripture with Church Teaching in a genuinely contextualized development of a theological topic.

The content of the required Theology courses, then, attempts to touch the major current religious/theological interests and problems of the day, in a truly inculturated manner, but in a **SYSTEMATIC**, ordered, and holistic manner.

The intellectual demands made by these courses should be comparable to those of the better academic courses offered by other departments to the same students. This actually puts a unique burden on the Theology faculty, since their subject matter (Christian Faith) alone among all college courses, has been taught to the great majority of Catholic college students since grade school. The challenge is to draw the students toward a more personally critical, mature understanding and love of *their* Christian Faith, such that will motivate them to committed Christian social action and prayer throughout their lives.

COMMON TEMPTATIONS FOR THEOLOGY TEACHERS

In teaching this content, Theology teachers often encounter one or more of three common temptations. The *first* is to *offer watered-down versions* of graduate school or seminary Theology courses which the college Theology teachers themselves pursued in their professional training. This may initially build up the teacher's scholarly reputation, but is rarely helpful either for the authentic professional growth of the teacher, or for the students' growth toward maturity in their Faith.

A *second common* temptation for Theology teachers today is the tendency to *reduce the major content* of the theology courses to data presented by the *social and behavioral sciences*.³ Impressed by the real, legitimate contributions which these sciences have made to Theology, as well as by the sheer quantity of psychological, sociological and cultural anthropological published material, with their "scientific sheen," the typical Theology teacher is bound to feel a bit overawed and intimidated.

3. Cf. "Value Education/Moral Recovery and the Catholic Educator," *Landas* 3/2 (July 1989) 175-86.

"Faith" tends to come out a poor second in comparison with all these "scientific" facts. What is true of the typical Theology teacher is unfortunately even stronger among the students who are more susceptible to the contemporary reductionist "scientific mindset," and whose unconscious tendency is to reduce nuanced positions to oversimplified contradictions.

But from the standpoint of the Theology's program rationale, this attitude represents an understandable but nonetheless erroneous perspective. The basic realities of God, His Revelation, Presence and Grace, are not "picked up" by any social or behavioral science. The Theology teacher's own methodology and proper object of study is not washed out by these sciences. The proper inter-relation, then, of Theology with these sciences is one of dialogue and mutual support in the common pursuit of truth.

A *third common temptation* of Theology teachers is to let the Theology class slide into a spiritual formation session in Christian piety and prayer. This will be briefly addressed below in the section on "transformation in Christ" as the new focus in defining the "Purpose of the Theology Program." Here it is enough to recall that the Catholic college contributes to authentic piety precisely by being true to its own nature and purpose as an educational institution, distinct from family, parish, religious organizations, and the like.

C. METHODOLOGY OF OUR THEOLOGY COURSES

There is no doubt but that the major emphasis in educational courses today is on methodology, and religious education tends to follow suit. But this tendency has been blunted to some extent by the *NCDP's* insistence in Religious Education on *integration*. This basic notion can apply to:

- 1) relating classroom Theology to daily living;
- 2) bringing out the *experiential* dimension of *doctrine* by relating it to Christian *morals* and *worship*;
- 3) the harmonious interplay of the use of *Scripture*, *Church teaching* and *human experience*;
- 4) stressing Theology's relation to the concrete context (environmental inculturation); and

5) the *subjective integration* of the Christian message by the students (imaginative "loving knowledge").⁴

All these forms of integration are necessarily operative in any effective, authentic religious education. Their value, then, lies not in constituting a new, particular methodology distinct from other approaches, but rather in directing the attention of the Theology teachers to essential dimensions of the task and challenge of "education in the Christian Faith." Popular methodologies and trends come and go; these basic integrations remain constitutive of all authentic education toward Christian maturity.

In the concrete, however, this general methodological theory has to be actualized by specific procedures and actions. The basic method of putting this theory into practice has involved a three-step process in organizing our courses. A Theology department's *first* step usually is to work out — and revise many times — a *syllabus* for each of the courses. These syllabi are, *secondly*, often specified more concretely by drawing up a series of *theses statements* that summarize the core content of each course. The theses statements, *thirdly*, are developed in the carefully selected and ordered readings which have been gathered together to form the course textbook.

This procedure allows for constant updating of course content with new materials, while at the same time presenting a solid, objective core of subject matter for each course. It also allows a wide range of flexibility for the individual teacher's initiative and creativity.

Besides the periodic tests and class exercises common to most college courses, some Theology courses have tried to incorporate an "outside the classroom" *practicum* as part of the requirements for the course. This helps the students to develop their own prayer life, or relate to their local parish, or become acquainted at first hand with the real living conditions of the poor, or the actual experience of young married couples, and the like. Two main difficulties encountered here are *adequate supervision* and *continuity*: there are few faculty members available for such projects, and there is a built-in time limitation to most such

4. See the development of this theme in "The NCDP's Multiple Integrations," *Docete* 10/49 (April/June 1987) 2-10.

"practica" (the available possibilities for new exercises soon run out).

II. PROPOSAL FOR UPDATING AND RENEWAL

PRELIMINARY OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The general impression offered by a critical review of college Theology programs is that their basic rationale and implementation seem sound. This by no means implies there is nothing to improve and revise, but it does offer a clear encouragement to the Theology faculty: "You're on the right track. Don't lose hope!"

Signs of Weaknesses. However, there are clear signs of certain significant weaknesses in Catholic college education which call for serious, concerted effort at improvement. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) was critical of what it termed a spirit of *competition* among different Catholic schools. The report lamented the fact that many graduates of our Catholic colleges do not seem to have sufficiently imbibed Christian values. It decried the common cultural fixation on *elitism* in college education, which seems to be esteemed more as a *status symbol* rather than as a means toward greater service for the common good.⁵

In the face of these weaknesses, the PCP II quotes John Paul II's description of the proper religious and secular contribution of the Catholic University:

it is called to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society. Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as (1) the dignity of human life, (2) the promotion of justice for all, (3) the quality of personal and family life, (4) the protection of nature, (5) the search for peace and political stability, (6) a more just sharing in the world's re-sources, and (7) a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community on a national and international level. University research

5. See *Acts and Resolutions of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: CBCP, 1991) 113-14.

will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.⁶

A. UPDATE ON THE NATURE OF THE THEOLOGY PROGRAM

In view of the foregoing, college Theology could perhaps be described as a *"Theology for the Filipino lay person,"* or *"the study of the Filipino's vocation and mission as a Christian in the Philippines today."*

Filipino college students are culturally open and desirous of "reflecting *within faith*," beyond a mere neutral academic "study of religions." But because they are in the process of emerging from their "minor status," the great majority of college students need help to develop a deeper level of awareness, greater skills and sophistication in critical reflection, and more mature disciplined motivation, in order to theologize on the graduate, university level as described in the stirring excerpt from Pope John Paul II above. Moreover, they are neither policy-makers and astute critics in and of society, nor in the Church.

But as carried on with college students — where "they are actually at" — college Theology is often sharply criticized as too rational, too intellectualist, not sufficiently affective, personal, imaginative, evocative, and inspirational.⁷ This complaint — whose sheer perdurance over the years testifies to a certain validity — indicates that the real situation of the typical Filipino Catholic college student is a unique combination of three "publics" — the academe, the Church, and Philippine society.

Such complaints are never definitively answered once-and-for-all, but a balanced effort to correct such perceived deficiency would necessarily involve all dimensions of the Theology pro-

6. From John Paul II's *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities (1990) no. 32. The Pope has stressed the active role of the laity "in the privileged places of culture, that is, in the world of education," in his *Christifideles Laici*, the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (1988) no. 44.

7. For one example, see Andrew Greeley, "The Catholic Imagination and the Catholic University," *America* 164/10 (March 16, 1991). See also Robert Masson, "Theology for the Head, Heart, Hands and Feet: An Approach to the First Course," *Horizons* 13/1 (1986) 90-103.

gram: its consciously intended goals, its basic content, and its practical pedagogical methodologies. Such is the case in this modest proposal for updating and renewal: a few select suggestions are proposed in each area, which hopefully might contribute toward a practical, realistic response to this intellectualist reproach.

If the "nature" of college Theology is *"Theology for the Filipino Lay Person,"* it involves a certain *"Faith translation"* — an inductive, reflective and inclusive study of divine Revelation that equips the Catholic college students with the skills and procedures to interpret their daily experience in terms of the Christian Faith, and motivates them to practice their Faith in daily actions and prayer. This demands a systematic initiation and sustained exercise in using the basic theological sources: Sacred Scripture, Tradition, reason and experience.⁸ The best way to describe these skills is to center on the Purpose of Goal(s) of the Theology Program.

Purpose of Theology Program. The purpose proposed in the rationale for the Theology program is to lead the students toward *maturity in the Christian Faith.* This presumes the precise contribution of college Theology toward this goal is different from, and complementary to, the help contributed by the family, by the parish, and by other agencies. But taking a lead from the PCP II, we need to specify more concretely what this "maturity in the faith" consists in. Building on the nature of college Theology as *"Faith translation,"* and following the lead of PCP II which speaks of developing students to become agents of *"social transformation,"* we can sketch its primary purpose as *"transformation in Christ."* This involves the students' personal appropriation of Faith in terms of *religious, moral, intellectual, and ecclesial* transformations.⁹

This new stress on *"transformation"* as the explicit goal of college Theology may well represent a break-through in the

8. Cf. Douglas E. Wingeier, "Christian Education as Faith Translation," *Living Light* 14/3 (Fall 1977) 393-406. The author develops eight principles for interpreting Scripture as a basis for faith translation, and three senses of Tradition: normative, historical and dynamic.

9. Cf. Edward K. Braxton, *The Faith Community* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1990) esp. 138-46; also Clyde F. Crews, *Ultimate Questions: A Theological Primer* (New York: Paulist, 1986) esp. 137-54.

attempt to reconcile two perennial "camps" among Theology teachers: those favoring strict academic, intellectual standards, and those stressing spiritual formation and prayer. Transformation includes both as essential components, and unites them dynamically and functionally in what was traditionally termed "conversion."¹⁰ Today the "grammar of transformation" has been analyzed in great detail by theologians. Moreover, this represents one area in which Theology has admittedly gained immeasurably from the contributions of the social and behavioral sciences.¹¹

Therefore, one great advantage for our purposes is that this goal of "transformation" explicitly relates the college Theology program with other human sciences in a language they can understand. Yet at the same time it allows for a specifically "theological" meaning: transformation itself can and should be transformed when it is Christ's initiative through the Holy Spirit that is involved in both the origin and destiny of the transformational work. "Theology" therefore exercises a specific influence in transformational study, both in terms of a "Guiding Principle" in proposing the ultimate "transformation," as well as in particular "Learning Tasks" relating to the transformation sequence.

Two Cautions. Two cautions must be sounded before moving on to the content of the Theology program. The *first* is the openness of such schemas to *perversion*. What is presented in class to instigate student reflection and activity becomes an ANSWER to be memorized. Responsible student action turns into sheer imitation, involving no personal commitment on the part of the students. Briefly, even in the best intentioned efforts to implement a transformational scheme, the actual student educational activity can lapse into the exact opposite of what was intended. It then becomes a real perversion of authentic "trans-

10. See Mary C. Boys, SNJM, "Conversion as a Foundation of Religious Education," *Religious Education* 77/2 (March/April 1982) 211-24.

11. Cf. James E. Loder, "Transformation in Christian Education," *Religious Education* 76/2 (March/April 1981) 204-21. This "grammar of transformation" is commonly proposed in a five step sequence: (1) a persistent conflict; (2) interlude and scanning; (3) insight, felt with intuitive force; (4) release and re-direction of psychic energy; and (5) interpretation which tests the coherence and correspondence with the public context.

formation in Christ," a missed chance resulting in mis-education.

The *second* caution is against letting the various details of the analysis of the transformational process obscure the more basic ground on which the whole process rests. What we are after, as numerous Church documents repeatedly insist, is the *integration of faith and life*, with Christ as the center, serving as the supreme truth and value, and the criterion according to which all other values are prized and ranked.¹² Getting college students "to discern daily events and choices of Filipino life *in the light of faith*,"¹³ and motivating them to exercise Christian truths and values in their daily lives, is *not* one goal among many. It is the over-riding practical criterion for judging the effectivity of the college Theology program.

B. UPDATING THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

To more effectively accomplish the declared purpose of "transformation in Christ," this proposal for content updating is limited to three specific emphases, drawn from local ecclesial and religious educational thrusts: (1) *Christ-centeredness*; (2) *Social consciousness*; and (3) *Catholic tradition*.

CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS

Both the PCP II and the National Catechetical Year (NCY) have directed that Philippine religious education must be clearly and explicitly "*Christ-centered*."¹⁴ This focus responds to the direct challenge of various fundamentalist groups that have attracted a world-wide response, and which has revealed the deep spiritual hunger for Christ our Lord amidst all the secularism, materialism,

12. Cf. for example, the documents published by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: *The Catholic School* (1977); *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982); and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988).

13. NCDP, no. 87. But no anti-intellectualism is implied. For the exceptional role which philosophy can play in communicating the mysteries of the Faith, see Eric D'Arcy, "The Universal Catechism and Anglo-American Philosophy," *Living Light* 27/2 (1991) 140-50.

14. See PCP II *Acts*, p. 32; and the CBCP Pastoral Letter on the NCY in *Docete* 12/60 (Jan./March 1990) 55-56.

consumerism of the present day.

This Christ-centeredness means first of all a continued serious effort to improve the course in Revelation, Faith and Jesus Christ. Such an effort is an extremely difficult enterprise. *First*, there is an incredible amount of theological literature in Christology during the past ten years and continuing into the present. Much of it runs against the traditional Catholic creedal proclamation of Christ's identity and mission. Thus a balanced, critical, theological discernment is needed to evaluate the validity and permanent value of this continuous wave of new Christological literature. Such critical discernment does not come over-night. It presumes: (1) a solid grasp of the Catholic theological tradition, (2) a genuine openness to the current Spirit-inspired interests and felt-needs of Christians today, especially Filipino Christians, and (3) a sharp awareness of the *pitfalls* of rationalistic oversimplifications with which Church theological history is strewn.

Secondly, beyond the challenge of keeping abreast with the important new scholarly contributions in Christology, there is the even greater difficulty of selecting and effectively communicating to college students what really contributes to their "maturing in the Faith." Neither students nor Theology teachers seem to have reflected much on how little change in the students' basic "folk Catholicism" notion of Christ has been effected by all their high school and college Theology courses. The effort to help typical Catholic students to intellectually *understand* in contemporary language and image, WHO is Jesus Christ, seems to founder on the rocks of *either* the Scylla of memorized abstract formulas from little-understood contemporary theologians, *or* the Charybdis of individualistic piety that equivalently by-passes or ignores any critical theological influence.

But beyond the particular freshman Theology course, with its built-in situational problem of raising high school graduates to actual college-level study, there is the more demanding challenge of making all the Theology courses truly "Christ-centered." This challenge is not an idle wish or pious desire, but one key clue toward improving all the Theology courses. Christ actually IS the center of Church, Christian Marriage, Christian Commitment and the Church's Social Teaching. What is called for, then, is to bring out this inner Christ-core within the content and dynamic thrust

of each Theology courses. The challenge is to progressively draw the students, through the entire Theology program, toward a personal comprehensive understanding of the Christ-centeredness of all Christian Theology — and of their Catholic Faith. Fortunately, there is available a good amount of current literature that offers substantial help in responding to this challenge, but much more has yet to be done to “inculturate” this new material in the Philippine scene.

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Christ-centeredness is especially manifest in Christian moral discernment and the formation of a mature Christian conscience. The PCP II goes on to stress the formation of a “social” conscience, or social awareness that is indicative of a *Filipino* Christian conscience. Again, this can be taken as a special spur to improve the Theology course in Catholic Social Teaching. But it would be more to the point to understand “social consciousness” as an essential dimension of all Theology courses.

This is confirmed by a particular theme of the PCP II that has been stressed by the Council’s leaders and has caught the imagination of many commentators. The theme is *“The Church of the Poor.”* No less than nine detailed explanations are offered for the meaning and implications of this phrase. One key corrective is to lay to rest the “folk religiosity” notion that God wills anyone to be poor. To the destitute shanty dwellers of Favela dos Alagados, Pope John Paul II insisted:

Do not say that it is God's will that you remain in a condition of poverty, disease, unhealthy housing, that is contrary in many ways to your dignity as human persons. Do not say: 'It is God who wills it'.¹⁵

This “social awareness” which is indicative of the Church in the Philippines, the “Church of the Poor,” should strongly mark all our courses: on the Church, on the vocation of Christian

15. See John Paul II, “It is God who desires your human development,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 Aug. 1980, p. 7.

Marriage, and especially on Christian Commitment. The challenge has been expressed by the image of "tilting the entire community's center of gravity" toward the needy and destitute. The extraordinary help and aid offered by so many to the victims of the recent natural disasters of earthquake, volcanic eruption, and typhoon, has shown how natural this value is to the Filipino. This sensitive openness to witnessing and loving service must be built into our college Theology courses as an essential characteristic.

CATHOLIC TRADITION

A significant refrain met in the PCP II document is "*participation*," "*participative approach*," and "*participatory ethic*." The direct, immediate goal is undoubtedly on involving every baptized Christian in active personal participation in the life and mission of the Christian community, the Church. But one implication for college Theology course is that Filipino Catholic college students be progressively introduced into the riches of their authentic Catholic heritage. The students can hardly be expected to participate actively and effectively in something for which they have no love nor understanding. Moreover, a sound *theological* background in the meaning of being a Christian and belonging to the Christian community, the Church, is needed to clarify possible student misunderstandings arising from their social and behavioral studies. The Catholic Church is more than a sociological institution, and belonging to the Church is essentially different from joining the Rotary Club.

This new dimension of "content" may be illustrated by another PCP II theme: *discipleship*. This notion pulls together both the "Christ-centeredness" and "social awareness" into a personally committed, integrated life, located within the Catholic tradition. The key figure of Mary is offered to Filipinos as the model of discipleship and the first evangelizer.¹⁶ What this adds to the

16. This image of Mary as perfect disciple is among the more common in current mariology. See Bertrand Buby, S.M., *Mary the Faithful Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1985), and Patrick J. Bearsley, S.M., "Mary the Perfect Disciple," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980) 461-504.

content of college Theology courses is the focus on a personal, critical response to Christ's personal call. Too often our Theology courses have neglected this demand of the Gospel, perhaps under fear of being charged with indoctrination or emotional manipulation. The fact remains, however, that education in personal commitment to values of truth, goodness and love, as embodied in Christ, is essential to all authentic human growth. Such "indoctrination," when open and critically grounded — not a consciously one-sided, prejudiced presentation or based on emotional, exhortatory appeal — is a valid and necessary dimension inherent in all search for truth. The rationalistic, objectivist value-free image of truth has long since been disproved as an illegitimate legacy of the Enlightenment.

C. RENEWAL IN METHODOLOGY

The suggestions for updating methodology are based on three specific qualities strongly recommended by the PCP II, the NYC, and numerous religious education theorists: (1) *rooted in the living Word of God*; (2) *inculturated*; and (3) *systematic*.

ROOTED IN THE WORD

The only way to be authentically "Christ-centered" is to be solidly and constantly grounded in Scripture, God's living Word. The unfortunate fact that Filipino graduates of Catholic colleges are generally so unsure of themselves when faced with a biblical Fundamentalist challenge, surely points to a rather scandalous weakness in Catholic college Theology courses. For years the common reaction of many Catholic religious educators was to organize an intense weekend workshop in the Bible for religion teachers — or perhaps arrange for some lectures by a local Scriptural expert. Some advance was undoubtedly made, but relative to college Theology at least, it was, and is, completely inadequate.

As with Christ-centeredness, this challenge is far more complex than is usually recognized. It is *not* primarily a question of information about the Bible — though much of that is also sadly needed. What is at issue is a *Catholic formation* in love

and use of the Bible as God's living Word to us today. Such formation takes years of initiation and exercise; it only thrives in a climate of open, personal, Catholic spirituality that has learned to grow through the various stages of "maturing in Christian Faith."

The updating called for here in our Theology courses is a renewed effort at a constant, creative, and consistent interweaving of the basic theological sources of Scripture, Church teaching and human experience. While each source demands its own preparation and practice in its skillful use, Scripture presents a unique challenge. As with current Christologies, not only does the published work in Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics far exceed the synthesizing capacity of any religion teacher or group thereof. There is also the even more formidable task of discerning what is actually helpful and relevant to a college Theology course with its specific nature and purpose as described above. Certainly the great majority of current biblical studies are NOT pertinent to any particular Theology course. But even with those Biblical studies that are relevant and truly helpful, there is an extraordinary diversity of opinion on HOW TO USE them.

In lieu of any widely accepted and proven methodology on the proper use of Scripture, a few specific principles concerning college Theology courses will have to suffice. *First*, the nature of Scripture and God's public, on-going revelation cannot be left to the freshmen course alone. In all Theology courses, students must be consciously and intentionally exercised in the basic Catholic handling of Scriptural themes and texts. *Secondly*, such formation in the *Catholic appreciation* of Scripture is a *process*. It cannot be done all at once; it needs to be organized in a progressively deeper initiation and study. This takes time, planning, and careful follow-up.

Thirdly, in a Catholic formation in Scripture the *primary goal*, which must ever be kept clearly in mind, is NOT to offer detailed exegesis of individual texts for student memorization, but rather to educate them toward a Catholic love and skillful use of the Bible. Such a "Catholic" appreciation for the Bible would greatly help toward integrating two common contrasting attitudes characteristic of college students: (1) an incipient scientist rationalism picked up from various disciplines, contrasted with (2) their deep

Filipino spiritual yearning and piety. Theological Bible study must be critical enough to expose the students' mental rationalistic prejudices, yet holistic enough to communicate the Bible's spiritual message directed to their hearts.

INCULTURATED: AUTHENTICALLY FILIPINO

The need for a much more explicit and evident inculturation of the Christian message has been stressed for the past twenty years or more.¹⁷ Unfortunately, accomplishing this ideal has proven to be much more difficult than anyone expected. The shift to using Filipino as the medium of instruction in many Theology courses has greatly helped in pursuing this goal. But much creativity and insight is needed to avoid on the one hand mere superficial accommodation — for example, simply translating foreign sources into Filipino — or, on the other, a narrow type of nationalistic fervor that borders on racism. Simply put, communicating the Christian message, and educating in serious critical reflection on that message, must be done in the cultural terms, attitudes, and values of the hearers. It is a truism that the Gospel will be fully understood only when it has been translated and lived in every language and culture in the world.

John Paul II has described inculturation as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity, and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."¹⁸ But how does this come about in our Theology courses? My suggestion is that the key to inculturating our Theology courses more deeply is not to be found in any frenetic scramble for more local materials — though such materials are surely needed. Rather it is *by exercising students in seeing the Christian message and values in their daily Filipino lives, and educating them toward practicing these truths and*

17. See the *NCDP*, nos. 426-33 et passim. Pope Paul VI spoke to African Bishops of the slow journey of inculturation as requiring "an incubation of the Christian 'mystery' in the genius of your people in order that its native voice may be raised more clearly and frankly, and harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the universal Church."

18. See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (Vatican, 1990) no. 52.

values in their Filipino culture. More specific "Filipinized" articulations will naturally follow; the primary basis is actual living out of the Gospel.¹⁹

Inculturation is usually conceived primarily in terms of both the means for transmitting the Christian message and the ways of assimilating it by Filipinos. This involves the integration of Filipino and Gospel values, of popular religiosity and critical understanding of the Faith, of traditional festivities and rites with "new expressions" and modern means of social communication. But inculturation can also refer to the specific highly significant experiences, problems, and events of a particular culture.²⁰ Such, for example, was the EDSA Revolution of '86, or the present growing "environmental crisis" in the Philippines, intensified by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and typhoons. Such concrete experiences serve as the basis for authentic *Filipino* theologizing — or more simply, for the Filipino experience today of God the Father and the Risen Christ in their Spirit.

SYSTEMATIC METHODOLOGY

The final recommendation for renewing our methodology, namely, that it be *systematic*, is drawn from the resolutions of both PCP II and NCY.²¹ The resolutions of both groups were inspired by a sharp awareness of the real harm brought about by the piecemeal, disconnected efforts that unfortunately char-

19. Cf. John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 54 where he states: "inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic 'sensus fidei' which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation must be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith."

20. Cf. *The 'Miracle' of the Philippine Revolution*. Interdisciplinary Reflection. *Loyola Papers* 15 (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1986). Other examples of how this works are provided by Russell A. Butkus, "Linking Social Analysis with Curriculum Development: Insights from Paulo Freire," *Religious Education* 84/1 (Winter 1986) 568-83; and Anthony Garascia, "Environmental Issues in Catechesis," *Living Light* 27/2 (1991) 123-30.

21. See PCP II *Acts*, p. 33, and the "Proceedings of the NCY Closing Events," *Docete* 13/63 (Oct./Dec. 1990).

acterize so many religion programs in both public and Catholic schools. While referring directly to catechesis, the admonition for systematic education in the Faith seems equally applicable to our college Theology programs, especially considering the possible harmful side effects of some of the other recommendations. The temptation for each college Theology teacher to create his/her own personalized course, with little or no relation to any other course in the same program, seems especially strong in the post-Vatican II era. The need for a systematic approach to both the college Theology program as such, as well as to each of the Theology courses in particular, must be stressed.

The classic contemporary delineation of "systematic" was given by Pope John Paul II:

- It must be *systematic*, not *improvised* but *programmed* to reach a *precise goal*;
- it must deal with *essentials*, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions;
- it must nevertheless be *sufficiently complete*, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma;
- it must be an *integral* Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.²²

Properly understood, "systemtic" in no way implies being bound to an iron-clad structure imposed in an authoritarian manner from without. Rather it simply means as members of the Theology Department we: (1) acknowledge our need to work in harmony with one another in order to more authentically communicate the Christian message; and (2) recognize the need to "give reason" for *what* we are doing, *why* and *how* — not improvising on the spot, nor shaken by every new fad or trend. Systematic in the end then comes down to the actualization of the multi-form "*integrations*" described early in this article.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

We shall conclude this study with a brief summary of the modest proposal for updating and renewal of college Theology

22. See *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 21, and the *NCDP*, nos. 74-75.

programs. The following represents the core of this proposal.

The *nature* of college Theology was described as "Theology for the Filipino Lay person, a study of the Filipino's vocation and mission as a Christian in the Philippines today." Moreover its *purpose* of "maturing in the faith" was specified in sharper detail by "*transformation in Christ*," while the underlying relation between Faith and life (culture) was highlighted.

Suggestions for updating the *content* of the program centered on three emphases drawn from the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II): *Christ-centeredness, social consciousness, and grounding in Catholic Tradition*. Together, these three renewed emphases deepen the key reality of "*discipleship*."

Finally, both the PCP II and NCY stressed three basic dimensions for any authentic methodology in religious education in the Philippines today, namely: *rooted in the living Word of God, inculturated, and systematic*.