

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

**M**ichael Paul Gallagher, S.J. (“What Are We Doing When We Do Theology?”) explains the task of theology by grounding it on a commitment of faith and a believing community. Built upon a long history of reflection, theology nevertheless reinterprets and re-appropriates Christian tradition for the contemporary world. Gallagher notes that “theology for nearly a century now has been acutely aware of the challenge of an increasingly secular culture.” Today’s culture has profoundly shaped our interpretation of life. It is this “social imaginary” (as Charles Taylor puts it) that poses the greatest challenge to faith. It is on the level of imagination, rather than on a narrow kind of rationality, where theology needs a new language. “On this frontier the worlds of imagination—including art, poetry, music, and the new media—are more needed than a communication of theological content,” he says. “Theology, faced with these inner contexts of forgotten desire, needs to develop a ministry of disposition and to create languages of attraction and of invitation.” He also explains a variety of theologies based on changing contexts of human experience: biblical, anthropological, synthetic (inculturated), practical, transcendental, and counter-cultural. But context alone is not enough. According to Gallagher:

Although it is vital to listen to the questions of the culture and to discern the emerging sensibilities, that is only a preparatory phase for a delicate and demanding dialogue. If theology stays too focused on contextual questions, it can become a form of religious sociology, advocating worthy cultural positions but

without putting them really into contact with the drama and vision of the Gospel.

Dr. Carmen Valdés (“*Beguines: The First Women’s Movement in Christianity: A Time for a Return?*”) provides a succinct account of the history of the Beguines, a spiritual revival movement in the 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly in the Low Countries of Europe, that stressed imitation of Christ’s life through contemplative prayer, works of charity, and voluntary poverty. Some of these women lived in quasi-religious communities but without taking vows. Valdés recounts the struggles the Beguines had to face due to the prevailing bias against women in the medieval Church and the witch-hunt launched by the Inquisition against mystics and visionaries. A discussion of the writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete illustrates the new kind of bold mysticism inaugurated by the Beguines. Valdés asks:

Is it time to bring back to our spiritual life the essence of the Beguine spirituality and movement especially as exemplified by Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Marguerite? ... Within this three-dimensional world, what can we gain by giving free expression to bolder ways that are more inclusive of other religious approaches to the development of our inner life? Do we not need an all-encompassing spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The next two articles in this issue are research essays that were presented at the 2014 Annual Convention of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP) on the theme of poverty in the Bible: “Blessed Are the Poor” (Mt. 5:3). Helen R. Graham, M.M. (“But You Are the God of the Lowly, Helper of the Oppressed: God in the Prayer of Judith—Jdt. 9:1–14”) discusses how the deuterocanonical book of Judith presents God as the champion of the poor and the oppressed through the heroine’s theology and prayer. Chiding Uzziah and the people of Bethulia for giving God a deadline to save them, after which they would surrender to their enemies, Judith “speaks of the freedom of God to save or not to save.” Graham notes: “God is radically free and is not to be threatened or cajoled ... Judith’s radical monotheism puts all in

God's hands ... the people are only to call upon God, trust God, and wait for God's deliverance if indeed it is God's good pleasure to deliver." Moreover, God tests and educates his people through suffering. Judith's prayer contains a number of epithets—e.g., God of my ancestor, defender of widows, divine warrior, God of the lowly, king of all creation, God of all power and might—which portray in various ways the God of Israel as the one "who executes justice for the orphan and the widow" (Deut. 10:18).

Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M. ("Luke's Good News to the Poor: Ambiguities and Challenges") explains the significance of the programmatic passage found at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Luke's gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ...." (Lk. 4:18–19; cf. Isa. 61:1–2; 58:6). Co investigates first the meaning of the verb εὐαγγελίσασθαι (to bring good news) and then the identity of the πτωχοί (poor). What did Jesus do to bring good news? Co studies all the various occurrences of εὐαγγελίσασθαι in Luke-Acts. "Bringing good news" is a fitting prelude to all of Jesus' subsequent activities: e.g., proclaiming the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, raising the dead, reconciling sinners to God, etc. The "good news" is Jesus himself and the authority manifest in his person. Who are the "poor" that are the recipients of good news? They are not just the needy and the afflicted, but also the sinners whom Jesus cared for and reconciled with God. Moreover, there are also those who have made themselves poor in order to follow Jesus. "What Jesus started in his ministry," Co notes, "is an alternative lifestyle of radical prophetic poverty. It is an alternative lifestyle that manifests radical trust in God, serves as a protest against rich living, and expresses solidarity with the least." This is the kind of poverty that challenges all of us who aspire to be disciples of Jesus.

Ramon L. Bautista, S.J. ("Discernment of Spirits in the Bible") notes that there are only a couple of explicit references to "discernment of spirits" in the Bible: 1 Cor. 12:10 (διακρίσεις πνευμάτων) and 1 Jn. 4:1 (δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα). There is no systematic treatment of the subject in the OT, but

the Biblical characters often dealt with the conflict between the good and evil spirits. “Needing careful discretion, like all of us today, these OT individuals,” according to Bautista, “had to ask pivotal questions in their own search for greater truth and meaning in their lives.” Thus, the practice of distinguishing the various kinds of opposing spirits is already well attested in the Hebrew Scriptures, even if both good and bad spirits are initially attributed to God as their source and only later on is the evil spirit no longer attributed directly to God. No matter how strong the influence of these spirits, the person always has the freedom of choice. In the NT, the evangelists deal implicitly with discernment in some of the parables and sayings of Jesus (e.g., Mt. 13:24–30; 25:31–46; Mk. 1:23ff; etc.). Jesus even offers one criterion for discernment: “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt. 7:16, 20; Lk. 6:44). John’s gospel presents a number of polarities which are matters for discernment, e.g., spirit and flesh (Jn. 3:6), light and darkness (Jn. 3:19), etc. Paul’s letters attest to many instances when he needed to make decisions regarding issues he faced in his mission (e.g., imposition of circumcision on gentile converts, observance of dietary laws, etc.). Bautista recapitulates his investigation by formulating a definition of discernment:

[It] is a process whereby the believer, in *faith*, examines prayerfully his or her affective experiences ... operative from within, including especially their direction and end. Doing this enables one to know, understand, and respond more authentically to God’s personal unique manner of unconditional loving here and now.

Francis D. Alvarez, S.J. (“The Temple Controversy in Mark”) interprets Jesus’ actions in Mark 11:15–18 as a prophetic act. But what message is it trying to communicate? Instead of limiting his hermeneutical optic to the Temple scene and the episodes close to it, Alvarez considers the temple episode as part of the larger story, the “good news” that Mark wants to proclaim. Hence, the author begins his “maximal interpretation” with the programmatic passage in Mk. 1:15 (“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news”). He goes on to explain the characteristics of Jewish eschatology, the various

aspects of time in Mark (καὶρὸς, ἀρχὴ, εὐθὺς), the present time and the age to come, the battle with cosmic forces seen in Jesus' exorcisms, and the Temple as a synecdoche for Israel. Within this broad canvas of Markan eschatology, the author now interprets Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his first visit to the Temple, the cursing of the fig tree, and finally, the demonstration in the Temple as fulfillments of various Messianic or eschatological prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures (Zech. 9:9–17; 14:21; Mal. 3:1–7; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11; etc.). In summary, Alvarez writes:

Mk. 11:17 brings together two quotes from the prophets that interpret Jesus' temple actions in this way: "The time of this temple has ended. There is a future temple in our horizon." ... Jesus was passing judgment not just on the temple but on all of Judaism; he was ending not just the time of the temple but everything Israel knew.

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**Note:** Due to a miscommunication, Eleanor R. Dionisio's essay entitled "Catholic Partisanship: Good or Bad for Democracy?," published in *Landas* 27:2 (2013): 35–50, was a premature version with incomplete citations and not yet intended for publication. It also included an error of fact (p. 40) which was corrected in a later version: the White Vote Movement endorsed only ten senatorial candidates, not a full slate of twelve; it was El Shaddai, a prominent member of the White Vote Movement, which endorsed twelve candidates, two of whom supported the Reproductive Health Law. The published version also did not include its provenance: the essay was a talk for a forum co-sponsored by the John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues (JJCICSI) and by the Ateneo School of Government, entitled "Political Parties and Civil Society in the Philippines," on February 12–13, 2014 at the Social Development Complex Audio Visual Room (SDC-AVR), Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City. It also failed to mention Ms. Dionisio's affiliation with JJCICSI, which she had intended to include in the author credits. *Landas* apologizes for the miscommunication.