

TST 116 The Craft of Theology

FROM THE *PROGRAMMA DEGI STUDI*

In this seminar, with Dulles as our principle guide, we will begin by asking “what is theology”. We will go on to explore the nature of revelation and the respective roles of revelation, reason and experience in the theological enterprise, and explore the relationship between theology and other disciplines, including philosophy and science. The main aim is to acquire a good understanding of theological methodology.

Short Indicative Bibliography:

- A. DULLES, The Craft of Theology, New York 1995.
B.LONERGAN, Method in Theology, London 1972.
K. RAHNER, Foundations of Christian Faith, New York 1986.
J. WICKS, Doing Theology, Mahwah 2009.

Allow me to spell it out further.

The aim of the seminar is to acquire a deeper understanding of the nature, purpose and method of Catholic theological enquiry. This should in turn lead to a deeper appreciation of the individual courses you will study in theology and their interrelationship.

As our principle guide we will be using Avery Dulles *The Craft of Theology*

Generally each week we will take one chapter of the book. You will be expected to have read the chapter and reflected on its contents and prepared a short piece of work relating to it which has been assigned the week before. There may also be a modest amount of additional reading from magisterial documents (encyclicals, conciliar documents etc.) or other sources. In the first part of the seminar we will look more closely at the chapter and the questions it raises. In the second part of the seminar I will expand on some particular theme using other resources, and we will then continue the discussion of the themes raised and their relationship to the courses you are studying.

The weekly papers will be taken in, marked, commented on, and returned the following week. The final mark will reflect both the mark received for your weekly papers (2/3)¹ and my own assessment of your overall contribution in class (1/3)

Apart from Dulles two volumes will be our constant companions – the Bible, and the documents of the Second Vatican Council. You should bring these to class with you.

I have a website – www.amilner.org – on which I will post additional resources and links to useful sites.

¹ For this I will take the average of your best six papers

Bibliographical Notes

Fr. Gerald O'Collins SJ, former Dean of Theology of the Greg and long time teacher here, produced a list of what he refers to as “some basic books for theology”, last revised in 2001. Rather than re-invent the wheel I will just make a few comments about updates and additional texts which I find useful.

The *Enchiridion Symbolorum* is now into its 40th edition and is available as a parallel text (with Italian) published 2009. It currently costs about €110 on Amazon though.

The documents of Vatican II in Latin are available as a relatively inexpensive little volume (€25) – Tanner (in English and Latin) will set you back about £130 on Amazon last I looked (14/10/11)

Some of the books are available in electronic form – notably the various Liturgical press encyclopaedias in the form of the *Collegeville Catholic Reference Library* published by Liturgical Press. It uses the Logos digital library system and includes both the NAB and NRSV and the Collegeville Bible Commentary (A viable alternative to the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* and more up to date) for about £130. *The Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* is available in the same system from www.logos.com, as is the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, though the latter two are rather expensive (though still cheaper than buying the print edition). Logos themselves now do specifically ‘Catholic’ base packages which include a mixture of ancient and modern – and now includes the documents of the Councils including Vatican II. There are also collections of papal encyclicals available, and many theological works, including Benedict and Von Balthasar. See www.logos.com.

Pope Benedict, in his former career, wrote extensively and some of his works are particularly relevant to our theme. These include:

Introduction to Christianity San Francisco, Ignatius, 1990 (German original 1968)

Principles of Catholic Theology San Francisco, Ignatius, 1987 (German original 1982)

There are a number of recent works on the Pope's theology including

Heim, M. *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology* Ignatius, San Francisco, 2007

Rowland, T. *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVII* OUP, Oxford, 2008

I have not read Hein yet – it is quite substantial and comes recommended by Bp. Michael Campbell. Rowlands shorter work is sympathetic (occasionally to the point of being apologetic). One does need to have some awareness of the theological background, especially during the Council, since she makes extensive reference to this in relatively shorthand form.

I also note that Fr. O'Collins has left a couple of his own books off the list which may be of interest – namely *Fundamental Theology*, New York, Paulist, 1981 and *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, New York, Paulist, 1993

Dulles, in collaboration with Patrick Granfield OSB he has produced

The Theology of the Church: A Bibliography New York, Paulist, 1999

which is a thematically arranged bibliography based around standard Catholic theological themes.

A Post Critical Theology?

Monday 22nd October

Read chapter 1 of *The Craft of Theology* and summarise its key points in up to 400 words. Include in your summary what you think Dulles means by 'post critical'.

Very briefly identify one or two points you found particularly enlightening or interesting, and one or two points you found puzzling or disagreed with.

Written work should meet normal academic standards.

Some Approaches to Theology

Gerald. O'Collins identifies three 'styles' of theology:

(cf. *Retrieving Fundamental Theology* pp. 7-15)

Rational	Practical	Contemplative
Faith	Love	Hope
Library	Piazza	Chapel
Knowledge	Action	Prayer
Prophet	Pastor	Priest
Truth	Goodness	Beauty
Rahner	Gutierrez	von Balthazar

Rahner speaks of a 'first level of reflection' in theology which he identifies with the councils call for an introductory course in theology in OT14. He observes the level of specialisation, fragmentation and pluralism in theology and observes that we cannot be masters of everything and observes "I *cannot* accomplish it and therefore a *need not* be able to (*Foundations of Christian Faith* p. 9, italics original. Cf. pp. 1- 14) but that there is "the theoretical possibility of giving a justification of the faith which is antecedent to the task and method of contemporary scientific enquiry, both theological and secular (*ibid*). This is a three stage task of reflecting on the "man as the universal question he is for himself", (reflecting on the "conditions which make revelation possible", and finally reflecting on "the fundamental assertion of Christianity as the answer to the question which man is" *ibid*, p.11).

Gutierrez

Theology as a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word does not replace the other functions of theology, such as wisdom and rational knowledge; rather it presupposes them and needs them. But this is not all. We are not concerned here with mere juxtaposition. The critical function of theology necessarily leads to redefinition of these other two tasks. Henceforth wisdom and rational knowledge will more explicitly have ecclesial praxis as their point of departure and their context (*A Theology of Liberation* London, SCM, 1988, p.11)

Sykes remarks that

Inherent in theology, regarded as a specialized discipline, requiring high intellectual qualities and prolonged training, is the perennial problem of faith and knowledge. Repeated attempts have been made to challenge the elitist pretensions of theologians from the side of spiritual humility, mysticism, religious experience (Luther) or (most recently) social practice. The most effective challenge, however, is the comparatively recent discovery that there is a diversity of forms of rational argument in different disciplines, each of which have a close relationship to the interests of a particular culture or group. The application of this insight to the procedures of theological argument forces the theologian to attend to the fact that Christianity exists in liturgies, rituals, art forms and other forms of cultural expression. Without the necessity of denying or undervaluing the tradition of learning characteristic of Christianity from the first, that tradition has carried out its own internal self criticism (The conclusion of "Theology" in Richardson & Bowden (eds.) *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* London, SCM, 1983, pp.566-7)

Symbolic Communication?

Monday 29th October

In Chapter 2 Dulles sets out his central ideas about the nature of theology and the theological task.

Central to this fairly dense and slightly longer chapter is the theme of “Symbolic Communication”. Try to explain in 100-150 words what he means by this, and then explore, in not more than 200 words, how this applies to one of the areas of theology he discusses. Finally, very briefly identify one idea you find particularly helpful or interesting, and one idea you find puzzling or disagree with to some extent.

For further reflection

Dulles makes use of Karl Rahner’s theology of symbol in this chapter. The key article is “The Theology of Symbol” in *Theological Investigations* 4, Baltimore, Helicon, 1966, pp. 221-252

The five key assertions which Rahner makes in this article are:

1. All beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily 'express' themselves in order to attain their own nature (224)
2. The symbol ... is the self-realisation of a being in the other (234)
3. The concept of symbol is an essential key concept in all theological treatises
4. God's salvific action ... always takes place in such a way that God himself is the reality of salvation, because it is given to man and grasped by him in the symbol, which... exhibits this reality as something present, by means of the symbol formed by it (245)
5. The body is the symbol of the soul... the self-realisation of the soul ... and the soul renders itself present and makes its 'appearance' in the body which is distinct from it. (247)

Models in Theology

Monday 5th November

Mysteries [of revelation] are interpreted through models... But all ... analogies limp. Often a failure to recognise the deficiency of the analogies leads to bitter disputes, even divisions in the Church. To heal these divisions it may be necessary to rediscover the limitations of theological models (Dulles p. 48)

Comment on this assertion in a maximum of 400 words the light of Chapter III. You may also like to glance at Dulles two *Models* books to which he makes explicit reference.

In class we will go on to explore some wider issues of models and metaphors in which Colin Gunton² and Janet Martin Soskice³ will be our guides.

² *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*. Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988

³ *Metaphor and Religious Language* Oxford, Clarendon, 1985

Metaphors in Theology⁴

What is a metaphor?

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance⁵

Such as

John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

(John 1:29)

The word 'metaphor' comes from the Greek *metapherein* meaning literally 'to carry across' - the meaning of a word is 'carried across' to something it does not directly refer to. Arguably nearly all language is metaphor, at least in origin. It seems at least reasonable to claim that abstract language is metaphor, where concrete images and experiences are used to express abstract ideas. And all language - indeed all knowledge, must have roots in the concrete.

But if this is basically true of language in general, it must be even more true of theological language. Here we must not get confused between metaphor and analogy. Analogy is the application of an abstraction from human experience (strength, love, knowledge) and applying it to God, acknowledging that the word as it applies to God is not being used in the same way as when it is applied to created reality. Metaphor is the use of a concrete to communicate an abstract. "He is an ass" means he is stupid and stubborn.

Language about God's essence tends to be analogy (though metaphor can be and is used at times). Language about God's action would seem to be best expressed in metaphor.

Metaphor as 'Second Class' Language?

Colin Gunton⁶ notes that metaphor is sometimes treated as 'second class' language, or even as a misuse of language. A rationalist and/or idealist desire for 'clear and distinct ideas' means that metaphor, which is the "application of an alien term by transference"⁷ is inherently suspect. Hobbes lists metaphor as one of the abuses of language, describing it as "when men use words... in other senses than that they are ordained for"⁸ (*Leviathan*) But ordained by whom? The use of 'ordained' here seems to be a metaphor! (29)

Is it the case that metaphor is a lower grade of language than the 'literal' use of words? Is it true that metaphor obscures a clear understanding of the world? Or is it precisely the opposite, that the use of metaphor actually advances our understanding of the world. As we advance in knowledge, in discovery, we need to find words to describe new things, and the process of doing this is finding words which in some way 'fit'. This happens in science

⁴ These notes are extracted from a longer piece on the Metaphors of the Atonement. I will place the full lecture on the website.

⁵ Collins Shorter English Dictionary (London, 1993)

⁶ For this our principle guide will be C. E. GUNTON *The Actuality of the Atonement, A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988). The page numbers in the following text refer to this book. Gunton draws his ideas about metaphor principally from Janet Martin Soskice *Metaphor and Religious Language* (see above)

⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1475 b7-8 cf. p.28

⁸ *Leviathan* Ed. M. OAKESHOTT, (Collier Macmillan 1651/1962) p.34

(electrical *field*, light *wave*). Metaphor, by allowing us to speak of and conceptualise new experiences, is actually a vehicle of discovery. It allows “accommodation of language to the causal structure of the world”⁹

Metaphor is a key element, perhaps the key element, in the way our language changes as we understand our world more and more.

Words are not ideal, platonic forms outside of the things they describe, but rather are drawn out of our experience of the world in a more Aristotelian sense, which brings us to the problem of the relationship between words and the world.

Language and Reality

If, then, we build up language by use of metaphor, if we find ways of expressing our experience of new things from our existing expressions and understandings, and if this has always been the case, where then the link with the world? Are we still stuck in Kantian dualism? Is language “no more than our imposing of mental constructs on an essentially unknown world” (33).

But do we have to insist that there is an absolute fit between language and reality in order to be realists? And is the language always tied to its original metaphor? The answer is probably ‘no’ in both cases. The fact that a description of reality is imperfect does not divorce the description from reality. And words are not wedded to their etymology.

Rather it would seem there is a constant fluidity, a shifting of the use of words. That which was once a metaphorical use for a word can become its primary meaning, or an equivocal meaning. Thus it seems there is no absolute distinction between literal and metaphorical uses of a word, and the movement towards a literal use does not necessarily abandon the metaphorical aspects.

The truth of a claim about the world does not depend on whether it is expressed in literal or metaphorical terms, but upon whether language of whatever kind expresses human interaction successfully or not. (35)

We are still left with the question as to how words relate to reality. What is the point of contact? are they just ‘arbitrary’ signs or is there a real link between the sign and the thing? Coleridge (cf. p.36) speaks of destroying

the old antithesis of Words and Things, elevating, as it were words into Things.

And SJ Brown (cf. p. 37) states that

imagery is a witness to the harmony between mind and matter.

This gives metaphor a ‘better’ purchase on reality than more ‘rarefied’ forms of language.

The world can be known only indirectly, and therefore metaphor, being indirect, is the most appropriate form that a duly humble and listening language should take. (37)

Metaphor is an essential part of the interplay between human beings and the world in which we understand the world in terms of ourselves and ourselves in terms of the world. Imagination is not a threat to understanding rather its necessary helpmate.

⁹ BOYD, “Metaphor and Theory Change” in A Ortony (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge University Press 1979) p. 358 quoted in Gunton *op. cit.* . p.31

Metaphor and Theology

Although empiricism has been discredited in much science and philosophy, it still casts its spell on theologians (41)

As a consequence much theological discourse tends to ‘collapse into subjectivity’ (41) since God is not knowable ‘objectively’ in Kantian or empiricist thought. Metaphor may still be valuable, but as a way of expressing, in narrative form, the story of the subjective searching or experience.

It is true that the way words refer to God and the way words refer to the world are not the same. Yet are they therefore unconnected? Once again we must go back to the way language works. Are words things which hang around waiting for something to come along that fits them? Or is it the other way round? Are words not rather tags we attach to things in order to get a ‘handle’ on them, enabling us to explore them further? This may be especially true of theological language. Do we know what the word ‘God’ means before we assert the existence of God, or do we discover the meaning(s) of the word through using it?

By attaching a word to a thing or experience we enable the referent to be understood, but also we change the meaning of the word. We fit the word to the reality and the reality to the word. This is particularly true of theological language. Christians find themselves in a different situation as a consequence of the ‘Jesus Event’ and use words (victory, justice, sacrifice) to ‘get a handle’ on this. By doing so they not only come to a greater understanding of the reality of their situation, they also change the understanding of those words. At least that is the theory. Does it work? Can this approach to theological language actually give us a handle on the reality about which we seek to speak?

Fundamental Theology

Monday 12th November

Having read Chapter 4 of *The Craft of Theology*, and in the light of the courses you are studying at present and your own reflection, write an article of approximately 400 words defining Fundamental Theology such as you might find in a dictionary of theology. The article should include references.

Some sources (you don't have to read them all!)

- R. Fisichella *Introduction to Fundamental Theology* Piemme, Cassale Monferrato 1996
- H. Fries "Fundamental Theology" in K. Rahner (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Theology* Burns & Oates. London. 1975, pp. 546-551
- D. Hercsik *Elementi di Teologia Fondamentale* (EDB, Bologna, 2006)
- R. Latourelle & R. Fisichella "Fundamental Theology" in R. Latourelle & R. Fisichella (eds.) *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* St. Paul,s, Slough, 1994, pp. 324-336
- G. O'Collins *Fundamental Theology* in A. Richardson & J. Bowden *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* London, SCM, 1983 p. 224
- G. O'Collins *Retrieving Fundamental Theology* esp. pp. 40-47
- G. O'Collins & E. Farrugia "Fundamental Theology" in G. O'Collins & E. Farrugia *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000, p. 94
- S. Pié-Ninot *La Teologia Fondamentale* Queriniana, Brescia, 2004
- F. Schüssler Fiorenza "Fundamental Theology" in Komanchak, Collins & Lane (eds.) *The New Dictionary of Theology* Gill & McMillan, Dublin, 1987, pp. 408-411

Scripture in the Church

Monday 19th November

In the light of Chapter 5 of the *Craft of Theology* and Church teaching (especially in *Dei Verbum*) outline in about 400 words what you would consider to be the key elements of a distinctly Catholic approach to the Scriptures.

FURTHER READING

The Pontifical Biblical Commission: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993)

This is quite a substantial document, however the address of Pope John Paul II (which forms a kind of foreword), the preface by Pope Benedict (in his former job) and the introduction proper give a good account of the theological rationale of the document.

There is a *Text and Commentary* available by Joseph Fitzmyer (Subsidia Biblica 18, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico Roma 1995)

Two other PBC documents of note are

The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible (2001)

The Bible and Morality (2008)

Bishops Conference of England and Wales: *The Gift of Scripture* (2005)

This is in many ways a combination of a summary of the PBC document, *Dei Verbum*, and a very brief introduction to the Bible. Published by CTS.

Benedict XVI Post Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010)

Available on the Vatican website www.vatican.va (go to Benedict XVI, then to Apostolic Exhortations, and you will find it there)

There is a useful website dedicated to this subject at

<http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/index.html>

The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church

Published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1993

The Pontifical Biblical Commission desires to indicate the paths most appropriate for arriving at an interpretation of the Bible as faithful as possible to its character both human and divine. The commission does not aim to adopt a position on all the questions which arise with respect to the Bible such as, for example, the theology of inspiration. What it has in mind is to examine all the methods likely to contribute effectively to the task of making more available the riches contained in the biblical texts. The aim is that the word of God may become more and more the spiritual nourishment of the members of the people of God, the source for them of a life of faith, of hope and of love--and indeed a light for all humanity (cf. *DV* 21).

From the Introduction

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CONCLUSION

Tradition

Monday 26th November

In the light of *Dei Verbum*, *The Craft of Theology* chapter 6 and any other relevant reading or information from your courses, define Tradition in your own words (not more than 50 of them) without using direct quotations.

In a further 400 words expand on your definition and comment on the role of Tradition in theology in the light of your definition.

Theology and the Magisterium

Monday 3rd December

After reading chapter 7 of *The Craft of Theology* answer the following in about 500 words

“What is the role of academic theology in the Church?”

Your essay should include (but not be dominated by) remarks on what should happen when a theologian feels in conscience he or she must dissent from the non definitive teaching of the church, and whether you think Dulles’ model for what should happen is realistic.

You may also wish to consult chapters 9 and 10 of Dulles book and the CDF instruction *Donum Veritatis* on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian (1990).

Theology and Philosophy

Monday 10th December

The Church, as you know, requires students for the priesthood to have a solid grounding in philosophy before studying theology.

Read chapter 8 or *The Craft of Theology* and, in the light of it, reflect on how your knowledge of philosophy has supported and helped your understanding of theology. Choose one 'area' of philosophy (either a particular discipline such as Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology etc., or a particular philosopher, or perhaps a particular course you studied in philosophy) and, in about 400 words explain how your chosen area has helped you in your study of theology.

Theology and Science

Monday 17th December

What is the relationship between theology and the physical sciences?

Read chapter 9 of *The Craft of Theology* and, reflecting on your own understanding of science and theology, outline in 400-500 words how you think these two areas of human understanding relate to one another. In particular you might want to reflect on the material relationship – where both science and theology want to say something about the same reality – for example what it is to be human, and the methodological relationship – whether scientific method can contribute to theological method and vice versa. You should illustrate your response with particular examples.

Further reading

There is a lot of literature about on this subject. Volumes I have personally found useful are:

Many of the books by John Polkinghorne

Rahner “Natural Science and Reasonable Faith”, *Theological Investigations XXI*, London, DLT, 1988, 16-55

Kitty Fergusson *The Fire in the Equations: Science, Religion & the Search for God*, London, Bantam, 1994

John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Oxford, Lion, 2007