

CATHOLIC THEOLOGY IN A CONTEXT OF (POST) MODERNITY

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In this paper, I would like to delineate the significance and the mission of the *Faculteit Katholieke Theologie* (FKT), of the Universiteit van Tilburg (The Netherlands), which was inaugurated on the 1st of January 2007.¹ Let us first look at the name that was given to the new faculty. It did not receive the more general name “Faculty of Divinity” or “Faculty of Theology”, nor was it called “Faculty of Christian Theology” in distinction from forms of non-Christian theology. No, its creators gave it the name “Faculty of Catholic Theology”, and this seems to be a statement. Within the world of

¹ The founding committee of the Universiteit van Tilburg (UvT), The Netherlands, has appointed the theologian Prof. Dr. Adelbert Denaux president of the faculty of Catholic theology (Faculteit Katholieke Theologie FKT). This new faculty is the result of the fusion of the Katholieke Theologische Universiteit Utrecht (KTHU) and of the Theologische Faculteit Tilburg (TFT) and was inaugurated on the 1st of January 2007. It aims at scientific training and research in service of offices and functions connected either to ecclesial missions or with ecclesial licence/permission. The faculty under the guidance of Prof Dr Denaux is the only faculty for Catholic theology in the Netherlands that provides academic training for church office. The faculty has locations in Utrecht and in Tilburg. The FKT has the recognition of the Church and may grant the canonical degrees of STB, STL and STD.

Christian theology, in any case, the name distinguishes the faculty from other institutes that teach “Protestant theology” or “Orthodox theology”.

Theologians from a Catholic background will readily admit the existence of typically Protestant theologians (such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and in this country, for example, H. Berkhof), or of Orthodox theologians (such as Boris Bobrinskoy, Olivier Clément, and others), and, consequently the existence of “Protestant” or “Orthodox” theology. Yet, they will probably be more hesitant to accept the label ‘Catholic theology’, even though they must admit that there are typically “Catholic” theologians (such as Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and in this country Edward Schillebeeckx, and many others). This conclusion invites us to establish a more precise picture of what exactly is meant by “Catholic theology”.

Our argument concerning Catholic theology in a context of post-modernity will take place in three stages :

- First, we begin with the current starting-point, namely a description of the situation in which theology and the practitioners of theology find themselves – a situation of plurality, even of fragmentation and factionalism.

- Second we inquire as to the criteria of an actual “Catholic theology” ; this question concerns its identity, unity and method. Our reflection on this point moves between the two poles of *fides et ratio*, faith and reason.

- Finally, our third consideration is more concrete : we address the challenge and how we attempt to deal with it.

1. Starting point : Multi-faceted theology between unity and fragmentation

Those who currently venture forth on the path of practicing theology, students and teachers alike, enter a multi-faceted domain in which it is not

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self-evident to find one's place. To an unbiased observer it is obvious that theology is a pluralistic endeavor, and whosoever delves into it needs be aware that he or she can only assume a limited standpoint, working on the basis of a particular perspective. Those familiar with the history of theology will be aware that from antiquity onwards, it has been a many-sided enterprise. Long before the emergence of modernity, Catholic theology was acquainted with several schools such as Augustinianism, Thomism, Scotism and so forth. In this sense, even the most classical Western theology was already a multifaceted reality.

Furthermore, anyone pursuing theology in an academic context will quickly realize that he or she is expected to move within an area of specialization – exegesis, church-history, dogmatic theology, moral theology, practical theology – each with its own method, field of research and any number of areas of specialization within the particular discipline. Transgressions are hardly tolerated, for to commit them would imply acting outside one's area of competency, and to do so is not acceptable in an academic context. Some of this is the consequence of a steadily increasing trend towards specialization in the scientific community, which even academic theology cannot escape. One consequence is the lack of genuine dialogue among the representatives of the various disciplines. Another consequence is our inability to find all-around theologians in our faculties of Catholic theology, able to have an overview of the entire domain of theology. The problem of the fragmentation of theology arises, as well as the paradox of unity and multiplicity in theology, and thus the problem of its identity.

In the introduction, we referred to the distinction between Catholic and Orthodox theology. This distinction is to be situated in the more general distinction between Western and Eastern Christianity. As theologians rooted in the Western tradition, we must be aware that beyond our borders and outside our lines of thought there exists another world which experiences and describes the relationship between God and the World in its very own manner, in categories of thought and language that we are less familiar with. This fact invites us to humility, to an awareness of our limitations, and to complementarity. It is claimed that Pope John Paul II once said that the

Roman Catholic Church only breathes with one lung, that of the West, and only reunification with the East would permit her to breathe with two lungs. What is true for the Church as a whole is also true for theology : Western theology needs the input of Eastern theology and vice versa. Perhaps we may characterize the difference between the two as being between theology as wisdom and theology as science.

Mutatis mutandis, that which applies to the distinction between East and West is also true for the relationship between Catholic theology and Protestant theology/ies. Ever since the Second Vatican Council, by virtue of its decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, gave the green light for Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement, the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church with the Protestant Church and other churches has entered into a phase of dialogue. The manner in which Catholic theologians engage in their discipline reflects, or rather, should reflect this new situation. From now on they cannot be but oriented towards ecumenism, that is to say they must assume an attitude of being willing to listen to and enter into dialogue with the critical questions and challenges raised by their Protestant colleagues and others. This situation of an inter-church dialogue raises the issue of the identity of 'Catholic theology' in a new manner ; Catholic theology can no longer afford to remain self-satisfied. Catholicism and complacency are incompatible !

Let us briefly point to the challenge presented by inter-religious dialogue in order to broaden the field of our investigation even further. Christians do not enjoy a monopoly on 'theology'. After all, Christian theologians very reluctantly adopted the term 'theology' from paganism.² Christians have to realize that non-Christians also think about the mystery we call 'God'. On this point Catholic theology, as a variant of 'Christian theology', is also faced with a challenge. What is our attitude towards the

² Still, the most instructive text concerning the history of the use of this concept is the entry *Theologie*, in H. Brink (ed.), *Theologisch Woordenboek*, Deel 3, Roermond & Maaseik, 1958, 4485-4541, spec. pp. 4485-4490.

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‘theologies’ of other religions to be ? Exclusive, inclusive, or pluralistic ³ ?
And what are the consequences for our identity ?

So far we have addressed the multi-faceted nature intrinsic to Catholic theology and its position with regard to non-Catholic and non-Christian theologies. We still have to add a few words about the place of theology in our modern, or else post-modern culture, as well as about the questions that thus arise concerning the essence and proper nature of theology. In a contribution about the inspiration of the Bible which appeared in 2006 in the Flemish journal *Collationes*. Wiel Logister describes the problem as follows :

“although the sales-figures for the Bible remain high, the impression persists that the Bible has become a part of our cultural heritage rather than still being considered the Word of God. This shift in perception is not unique. Theology is rapidly changing into a science of religion, a discipline which reflects upon what humans say about God. In our tolerant society, I may be of the opinion, and indeed experience, that God is speaking and addresses Himself to us through Scripture – but only in private ; no room remains for such a view in the public sphere

³ On this point cf. among others K.W. BREWER, *The Uniqueness of Christ and the Challenge of the Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, in H. HÄRING & K.-J. KUSCHEL (eds.), *Hans Küng. New Horizons for Faith and Thought*, London, 1993, pp. 198-215 ; COMMISSION THÉOLOGIQUE INTERNATIONALE, « Le Christianisme et les religions », in *La Documentation catholique*, N° 2157 (6 avril 1997) 312-332 ; A. DENAUX, « De uniciteit van Jezus Christus in een tijd van religieus pluralisme », in *Collationes* 28 (1998) 29-53 ; J. DUPUIS, *Jésus-Christ à la rencontre des religions* (Jésus et Jésus-Christ, 39), Paris : Desclée, 1989 ; ID., *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, traduit de l'anglais par Olindi Parachini, Paris, 1997 ; R. SCHWAGER (ed.), *Christ allein ? Der Streit um die pluralistische Religionstheologie* (QD, 160), Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1996 ; T. MERRIGAN, « De geschiedenis van Jezus in haar actuele betekenis. De uitdaging van het pluralisme », in *TvT* 34 (1994) 407-429 ; E. SCHILLEBEECKX, « Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* » 30 (1990) 259-275 ; M. VON BRUCK & J. WERBICK, *Der einzige Weg zum Heil ? Die Herausforderung des christlichen Absolutheitsanspruchs durch pluralistische Religionstheologien* (QD, 143), Freiburg, 1993.

or in the sciences. Considered a classic text in human history, the Bible is studied at universities by the same methods as any other literature: *formgeschichtlich*, historically, semiotically etc.”⁴
“Theology is rapidly changing into religious studies !”

This transformation of theology into a science of religion and religiosity is a product of modernity. It raises the question of the distinction and mutual relation between theology and the science of religion. In the last two years, the *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* has published a series of articles on this debate.⁵

This line of inquiry is not new. In 1987, H.J. Adriaanse and others had already distinguished two concepts of theology. The distinction has to do with the question of what constitutes the proper object of the study of theology. In general, one may distinguish two notions: the idea that theology is about God (or the gods), and an idea which avoids this implication.

- The first posits that theology can only be about God, since the reality of God is its specific object of study (a *logos* about *theos* just as the term ‘theo-logy’ suggests).

⁴ W. LOGISTER, « De inspiratie van de Schrift », in *Collationes* 36 (2006) 343-362, spec. p. 343.

⁵ J. VAN DER VEN, « De relatie van theologie en religiewetenschappen in een vergelijkende wetenschaps-beoefening », in *TvT* 45 (2005) 119-137 ; J.-P. WILS, « Religie als object van wetenschap- van welke wetenschap ? », in *TvT* 45 (2005) 138-152 ; G. WIEGERS, « Afscheid van het methodologisch agnosticisme ? », in *TvT* 45 (2005) 153-167 ; G. ESSEN, « ‘Wie observeert religies ?’ De verhouding van godsdienstwetenschappen en theologie in tijden van terreur », in *TvT* 45 (2005) 168-188 ; J. JACOBS, « Kerkgeschiedenis of religiegeschiedenis ? », in *TvT* 46 (2005) 209-219 ; A.F. SANDERS & M. SAROT, « ‘Religie en haar wetenschappen’ » (*TvT* 2005 nr. 2) : « voortgaande discussie », in *TvT* 45 (2005) 331-347 ; F. VOSMAN & S. WENDEL, « Voortgaande discussie over ‘Religie en haar wetenschappen’ » (*TvT* 2005 nr. 2), in *TvT* 46 (2006) 101-119.

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- The second posits that theology may also be about God, but then in terms of how God is spoken about by human beings.

In the latter, ‘theology’ is concerned with religion as the totality of expressions of the human orientation towards God. Whether in so doing human beings go astray or walk in the truth is left open. We may call this second concept of ‘theology’ science of religion. The scientist of religion puts God (whether He exists or not) between brackets. Only a humanities orientation towards God – that is to say, towards that which they call god – remains as the proper object of study of science. One may speak here of a ‘reduction’. The term ‘God’ is no longer accepted as a scientific concept. The status of the term ‘God’ changes from that of an *etic* term to an *emic* term.⁶ This second notion comes to the conclusion there is no longer room at a university for ‘classical theology’ as reflection upon God. It is, after all, in a certain sense, not scientific. It is an irony of history that theology, which once stood at the cradle of the university as such and occupied a predominant position therein, should now be consigned to the margins of the university, and only tolerated if it mutates into science of religion. From the perspective of theology, the distinction between theology on the one hand and philosophy of religion and science of religion or divinity on the other hand, is ultimately not to be found in their different objects of study. Rather, the distinction is to be situated in the fact that in theology “man’s reason [...] has not been left to its own devices. It is preceded by a Word which, though logical and rational, does not originate from reason itself, but has been granted it as a gift, and as such, always transcends it.”⁷

⁶ H.J. ADRIAANSE, H.A. KROP, & L. LEERTOUWER, *Het verschijnsel theologie. Over de wetenschappelijke status van de theologie*, Meppel – Amsterdam : Boom, 1987, p. 57.63-66.

⁷ J. RATZINGER, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie. Versuche zu ihrer Ortsbestimmung im Disput der Gegenwart*, Einsiedeln, Freiburg : Johannes Verlag, 1993, p. 91. Translated into English as : *The Nature and Mission of Theology. Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s debates*, Translated by Adrian Walker, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1995, p. 103-104.

Discussions about the scientific character of theology belong to the debate that has been started by the Enlightenment. In this sense it is a “modern” discussion. However, the insights of modernity are in turn called into question by contemporary post-modern culture, which, according to my Leuven colleague **Lieven Boeve**, is characterized by “de-traditionalization” (a better concept than “secularization”) and pluralization. According to him, this new situation calls the paradigms of the exercise of theology, which were applied until recently, into question. So-called correlation theology, which thought to offer an answer to modernity by stressing the continuity between Christian tradition and modern culture, is no longer equal to the task. A new conception of theology, which emphasizes the discontinuity between the two, is supposed to be emerging ; in short, theology functions primarily as a critique of modernity and post-modernism. Opposed to the former mediating, bridging function of theology is now its separating function, continuity is opposed by discontinuity.⁸

In passing, we would like to remark that in our opinion, good theology always aims to seek a balance between continuity and discontinuity with the surrounding culture. It is for that very reason that it is ‘Catholic’, by being able to maintain both extremes of the spectrum.

What may we take away from this brief description of the multi-faceted situation of plurality, fragmentation and marginalization in which contemporary theologians and theology reside ? It invites us to seek the criteria for a truly Catholic theology. What are the ‘necessary criteria’, in other words, what are the norms that permit us to say : this is ‘Catholic theology’ in distinction to other approaches, scientific or not, that have God or religion as their object of study ? The inquiry as to these criteria is at the same time an inquiry into the identity and method of the Catholic exercise

⁸ L. BOEVE, « La théologie comme science critique en Europe », in *Bulletin ET* 16 (2005) 37-60 ; ID., *God onderbreekt de geschiedenis. Theologie in tijden van ommekeer*, Kapellen : Pelckmans, 2006.

of theology. After all, not just any religious theory may be labeled Christian or Catholic theology.⁹

2. Criteria of “Catholic theology”

We will approach the question concerning the criteria of “Catholic theology” from a fundamental paradox which has determined Christianity from its very origin onwards, namely the tension between *fides et ratio*, between faith and reason. Theology will always have to move within this field of tension between faith and reason. It is precisely theology’s ability to maintain both poles which guarantees its catholicity.

« An operative criterion of Catholic theology since patristic times has been the supposition that faith and intelligence are friends. Theology is possible because reason is by its very nature ordered to truth and because revelation is a manifestation of the truth of God. Catholics stand by the teaching of the First Vatican Council that ‘there can be no real disagreement between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals the mysteries and infuses faith has also endowed the human mind with the light of reason.’ »¹⁰

When theology one-sidedly opts for faith, it lapses into fideism, fundamentalism or merely an apologetics for its own tradition. When it exclusively chooses rationality it threatens to be swept along in the current of rationalism, pure empiricism, and what John Henry Newman called ‘liberalism’. Let us make both poles more explicit. Faith and reason, after all, are not univocal concepts. To believe and to think rationally, both basic human attitudes, may be understood in various ways. We must therefore

⁹ J. RATZINGER, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie* (n. 6), p. 7. *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, p. 8.

¹⁰ A. DULLES, « Criteria of Catholic Theology », in *Communio* (Engl. Ed.) 22 (Summer 1995) 303-315, p. 305.

specify more precisely what we mean by them if they are to be useful as criteria for a 'Catholic theology'.

2.1 Theology in the context of ecclesial faith (the ecclesial statute of theology)

Theology presupposes faith. It is situated in the paradox of faith and science. He who abandons one of these poles, abandons theology. *Fides ex auditu* says Paul. Faith arises from hearing God's Word. Faithful obedience means to hear God's Word. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1,1) which reveals itself to mankind, and through which the invisible God becomes visible and makes Himself known (John 1,18). To come to faith is a transition from a state of ignorance to a real knowledge of the mystery of God. When they were still pagans, so writes the author of the epistle to the Ephesians to the converts, they did not yet know God: "having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance (*agnoia*) that is in them because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph, 4,18). But now they have come to know Christ. They have heard (of) Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth (*alètheia*) is in Jesus (Eph, 4 :21). Or, in Paul's words: "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge (*gnosis*) of the glory of God in the face of [Jesus] Christ" (2 Cor 4 :5). Faith includes knowledge of God through Christ.

In the face of the contemporary skepticism and the agnosticism in principle towards the metaphysical reality of a particular conception of science, Christianity must not neglect to affirm this fact. Thus, conditions to speak of a Christian theology are :

- (i) **the primacy of the God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ**
- (ii) **humankind's response through faithful obedience**
- **and (iii) the possibility of man and woman to know God.**

God's Word precedes any reflection on faith. They relate to one another like text and interpretation. Without a text, no interpretation is

possible. If God has not spoken, if His Word cannot be heard and read, then there is no theology. If God cannot be known, then theology does not deserve a place in the centers of knowledge that are universities. In a time of metaphysical agnosticism, it must be stressed that the central concepts with which we know God are not merely metaphors, but are analogical concepts. To be true, the mystery of God can never entirely be grasped by human reason, and every analogy contains a moment of negation. But knowledge by analogy begins with an affirmation and ends in the *via eminentiae*.¹¹

What is more, faith enlarges the closed subject into a reality which is more encompassing than itself, and thereby opens the subject's perspective onto the transcendent. The man who has come to faith dies to himself, the former man, the isolated subject of the "I", in order to be subsumed in a new, more encompassing subject, Jesus Christ. "It is no longer I who lives but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2,20). This turn, this 'conversion' of the self-satisfied 'I' is a process of de-centering, in which man opens to a reality greater than the self.

Faith is not merely a private experience, although it is a deeply personal event, which on the one hand is granted through participation in the events at the cross, and on the other hand is a personal decision of the individual. Succinctly put, the subject of faith is not the individual, but the community of the faithful, the Church community. The subject of the "I believe..." at the beginning of the confession of Faith is the Church as a whole.

Faith is not simply surrender (*fides qua*) it is also content (*fides quae*). Its content is determined, can be expressed and demands an agency which can put the faith of the Church into words. According to Catholic tradition this *magisterium* is exercised by the college of bishops in communion with the bishop of Rome. The individual believer participates in that faith, becomes one with the subject that is the Church. He or she is

¹¹ A. DULLES, « Criteria » (n. 9), p. 305.

merely a small link in the whole of the *sensus fidelium*. He may immerse himself in the experience of God and the mysticism of Christ of the saints. The church community transcends time and space : rooted in the apostolic tradition it grows like a flowering tree (apostolicity), the branches of which reach until the ends of the earth : it permeates all cultures and people (catholicity). One becomes a deeper believer when one enters into that space, joins this community of tradition, thought and life that is the Church, by living personally from out of this fullness of life and participates in its understanding, its speech and its thought.¹² In short, faith is in essence ecclesial faith.

Anyone who practices theology is situated within this greater whole. Theology is one of its fruits. Theology is per definition ecclesial. The Church says to the theologian : all that is mine is yours, Scripture, the many aspects of tradition, the great theological syntheses that extend from Ireneaus to Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Theologians are called to elucidate this tradition in its many aspects rationally, to develop it, to put it into words, and to defend it with reason (1 Peter 3,15) in the ever changing cultural context in which we live. They do not only reflect on what they as individual can (still) believe of what is furnished by tradition. Hence they do not limit their field of research to that which still makes sense to them within a particular horizon of understanding. Rather their reflections are about the faith of the community (in our case that of the Catholic Church) which is more encompassing than their own, limited faith. *À la limite* we may even imagine that, when doing theology, they make the *epochè* regarding their own faith (so called methodological atheism), but the scientific nature of their work demands that they take seriously all aspects of the tradition of faith which they study.

¹² J. RATZINGER, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie* (n. 6), p. 81. *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, p. 93 – 94.

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Today's theologians do not have an easy task. They stand in a field of tension between the great Catholic tradition and contemporary culture. Indeed, already for a few centuries the theologian's orientation vis-à-vis tradition has taken place within the cultural context of 'modernity', in which the (Christian) tradition is undermined by rationality, in particular by historical consciousness and a scientific view of the world and the human being.

In the meantime it has become apparent that modernity itself does not offer any proper solace to the more profound questions of meaning of humanity. The Flemish philosopher Herman De Dijn has taken note of various reactions to this growing awareness of the vulnerability and contingency of tradition: a fundamentalist falling back on tradition, the 'belonging without believing' of the 'pious unbelievers' (in contrast to the 'believing without belonging' of the much larger group of nondenominational believers), and a return to the experience of inner spirituality.

The most frequently occurring post-modern reaction is that of what he calls an 'expressive individualism' in which the individual attempts to give meaning to his existence by means of the construction of his very own 'lifestyle' which he or she finds appealing and which leads to the individual's self-realization, and, hopefully, also to recognition by others. Within a consumer society the individual selects a number of lifestyle goods, also selecting bits and pieces of religious traditions in the process. "This *bricolage* of giving meaning, and the quest for interesting experiences and kicks, do of course have a function", states De Dijn.

"Paradoxically enough this individualistic activism is the collective means by which one seeks today to deal with the finitude and vulnerability of existence as well as the threat of meaninglessness. What is prevalent is not the sorrow for what has been lost, nor the leap into certainty and blind obedience, but rather a sort of happy *Spielerei*. Meanings and values become pure means of self-expression which

others not only have to allow us ; they must find us interesting as well. The only taboo which remains is pain, the confrontation with what is not comfortable, with suffering and death.”¹³

Truly it is no easy task to practice theology within this context. And yet theologians will have to attempt to avoid two extremes : to barricade themselves behind tradition without any dialogue with contemporary culture, or to uncritically adapt to post-modernity by means of what Albert Görres calls a ‘Hinduization’ of Christianity, “in which faith propositions no longer matter because the important thing is contact with a spiritual atmosphere which leads beyond everything that can be said.”¹⁴

2.2 The rationality (reason-ability) of theology (the epistemological statute of theology)

We have arrived at our second pole : the reason-ability of theology, theology as a rational undertaking, or, to be more precise, theology’s scientific statute in the *universitas scientiarum*. We have already pointed out that it is the scientific character of theology in the Netherlands which is up for discussion. The concern for the scientific nature of theology in the Netherlands has even lead to the fact that the theological faculties of Catholic character did not succeed in arriving at a project for one faculty of Catholic theology. Some fear that too great a patronage by the Church will make scientificity and accompanying academic freedom impossible. What is there to be said about this subject ?

To begin with, within the Catholic tradition theology understands itself as a particular – and not as the only – realization of the *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith which strives for insight, which attempts to elucidate

¹³ H. DE DIJN, *Religie in de 21^{ste} eeuw. Kleine handleiding voor voor- en tegenstanders*, Kapellen : Pelckmans ; Kampen : Klement, 2006, p. 27-31, in particular p. 30.

¹⁴ A. GÖRRES, « Glaubensgewissheit in einer pluralistische Welt », in *IKZ* 12 (1983) 117-132, spec. p. 129.

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rationally the intelligibility of its object of study, namely the tradition which states that a personal God addresses Himself to mankind through Jesus Christ with an eye on the ultimate salvation of mankind. As such it understands itself as a 'science' (namely the *scientia Dei*) within the concert of the sciences.

Nonetheless we must keep in mind that science and rationality are historically determined concepts inscribed in a well-defined tradition of thought.¹⁵ The concept of a *theory* of the sciences is a central part of the current western paradigm of science. To be precise such a theory, is "[a] system of a logically connected, in particular non-contradictory claims, opinions and concepts concerning a domain of reality, which is formulated such as to make it possible to deduce [further] verifiable theories."¹⁶ In order to be called a scientific theory, such a system must conform to at least five conditions :

(1) **precision** : it must be clear to which domain of reality the theory is applicable (scope) and which type of clarifications it offers (explanatory extent) ;

(2) **consistency** : in the entire set of all proposition with which the theory is formulated no contradictions may occur ;

¹⁵ Cf. P. K. FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason*, London : Verso, 1987 ; FT : *Adieu à la raison*, Paris : Seuil, 1989, p. 50 : "La science doit être traitée comme une tradition parmi d'autres, et non comme une norme destinée à juger de ce qui est et de ce qui n'est pas, de ce qui peut ou ne peut pas être admis." We borrow this quote from B.-F. MABASI BAKABANA *Les limites d'une théorie de la rationalité*, in L. Santedi & M. Malu Nyimi (eds.), *Épistémologie et théologie. Les enjeux du dialogue foi-science-éthique pour l'avenir de l'humanité*. FS. T. Tshibangu (Recherches Africaines de Théologie ; Travaux de la Faculté de Théologie, 18), Kinshasa, 2006, pp. 413-447, spec. p. 423.

¹⁶ Cf. A.D. DE GROOT, *Methodologie. Grondslagen van onderzoek en denken in de gedragswetenschappen*, Den Haag, 1972, geciteerd in H.J. ADRIAANSE, H.A. KROP, & L. LEERTOUWER, *Het verschijnsel theologie* (n. 5), p. 54.

(3) **empirical verifiability of the theory**, or at least of hypotheses deduced ; in other words “it must be possible to indicate particular states of affairs subject to sense perception which are consistent with the theory in question, and others which are inconsistent with it” ;

(4) **correctness** : it must be possible to confirm the hypotheses deduced from the theory in fact, that is to say, they must pass their test in fact ;

(5) **universal acceptability of its presuppositions** ; every theory has presuppositions (a historical theory presupposes that we can know the past, a physical theory presupposes that the laws by which we know a natural occurrence will also be valid in the future ; a theological theory presupposes that God exists).¹⁷ Some are of the opinion that ‘classical’ theology that has God as its object, can only meet one of the five criteria, namely the demand for consistency, and even that can only be met in principle. All other conditions cannot be met by ‘classical’ theology or encounter great difficulty.

However, rationality is an analogous concept. There are various models of rationality, for example, those which are referred to as open and closed rationality.¹⁸ The philosopher Habermas points to two ‘epistemological continents’, the continent of the experimental sciences and that of the human sciences.¹⁹ Scientific theology belongs to this second world, and it is futile to try to force upon it the restrictions of a model of the sciences which is not adapted to its domain of research. This is the case if

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54-56.

¹⁸ B.-F. MABASI BAKABANA, *Les limites* (n. 14), pp. 444-447.

¹⁹ B.-F. MABASI BAKABANA, *Les limites* (n. 14), p. 417.

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one chooses for a one-sided model of empirical theology in which there is no room for the question of truth, but only for empirical verification.²⁰

Theology does not merely register empirically how people think about God, behave towards Him, or speak to Him, but it reflects upon how God relates to the world, intervenes in history, speaks to humankind and invites it to a particular attitude toward life in order to bring salvation through His son Jesus Christ. Theology is not a purely rational, but also a relational undertaking. One forces even more restrictions upon it in the case of attempting to measure the meaningfulness or relevance of religious representations against the yardstick of ‘common sense’²¹ or the golden rule, interpreted not from a biblical perspective, but in the line of Immanuel

²⁰ To us it seems that any plea for an exclusively empirical model of theology is very much indebted to a scientific conception of the sciences. The monopoly of a scientific concept of the sciences – uncritically based on a purely instrumental understanding of reason, the notions of neutrality and objectivity, and the positivist principles of verification and falsification – is as such rightly critiqued by S. WENDEL, in « Spreken over God op de Areopaag : Theologie als redelijke rechtvaardiging van het christelijk geloof », in *TvT* 46 (2006) 113-118, spec. 116-117.

²¹ J. VAN DER VEN, « De relatie van theologie en religiewetenschappen in een vergelijkende wetenschapsbeoefening », in *TvT* 45 (2005) 119-137, p. 133 : “The level is too high if the representations depart from common sense to such an extent that the human brain would have to make too hard an effort in order to retain them as relevant representations, for example when God is represented as one God in three persons, or Jesus as a person with a divine as well as a human nature : they too fade away, simply because they go against the fundamental economic principle according to which the brain produces attributes at the lowest possible cost”. In our opinion, such a discourse demonstrates the inadequacy of an economic, properly speaking even mathematical, principle as the norm for judging the relevance of the mysteries of the Trinity and Christology.”

Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, as exemplified by human rights.²²

Perhaps, in a university setting it is also the task of theology to point to the limits of reason²³, to warn against the inflated self-estimation of autonomous reason when it pretends to be the only source of (certain) knowledge, and to warn of the danger of a monopoly and the ideological abuse of a certain type of (western) rationality and concept of science.²⁴ In true *academia* there must be room for various types of reason and a variety of concepts of science.

Paradoxically it is theology which, from a position of being embedded in a particular tradition of faith, reminds the academic world that human thinking extends beyond the Western concept of science prevalent for the last two centuries, and that the questions which occupy humankind exceed the solutions offered by strict science. In this respect the Church's regularization of theology need not necessarily threaten academic freedom ; it may even promote it, even though tensions often arise in their relationship.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 134-137, on theology and science of religion : "For their normative character, both disciplines – in the case of theology after internal reflection – ultimately rely on human rights, as a the development of the golden rule, which can be found in all religions." (p. 137).

²³ Cf. B. PASCAL, *Pensées* 267 (éd. Brunschvicg), Paris : Garnier Frères, 1930, p. 267 : "La dernière démarche de la raison est de reconnaître qu'il y a une infinité de choses qui la surpassent ; elle n'est que faible, si elle ne va jusqu'à reconnaître cela." "The last step of reason is the recognize that there are an infinity of things that surpass it ; it is nothing but feeble if it does not proceed to this recognition."

²⁴ B.-F. MABASI BAKABANA, *Les limites* (n. 14), p. 436, claims that the work of Feyerabend "soulève un problème crucial : le discours sur la rationalité [occidentale] joue (aussi) une fonction idéologique (c'est-à-dire une fonction d'exclusion [d'autres types de rationalité] et de légitimation [de sa propre type de rationalité].)"

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After all, traditionally the academy is a place for genuine dialogue in which words are not merely pronounced, but in which one also listens, encounters take place, relationships are established and insights are produced that deepen and nourish human existence.

The theologian Joseph Ratzinger has rightly pointed to the link between **freedom and truth**, in particular in the academic context. According to him academic freedom is not just any freedom, be it freedom from any commitment, the freedom of an institution, and it is certainly not the freedom to create human beings and things (not all that can be created is morally justifiable). Rather freedom is the freedom to seek the truth for its own sake, and not because one seeks to attain one or other utilitarian goal. The question of truth is intrinsically linked to the question of freedom.²⁵ Freedom that is not aware of being limited by truth is only oriented towards the production and creation of things, and as such submits to the dictatorship of a utilitarian calculus in a world free of truth. In so doing it achieves the enslavement of mankind under the guise of liberation. Only when truth for its own sake enjoys validity, and only when ‘to see the truth’ means more than scientific success, only then are we really free.²⁶

Theology may then also be characterized as **wisdom in search of truth**. In this respect we also wish to point to the link between theology and philosophy. Both need to be distinguished, but they need not be opposed to each other. In a university setting they are allies, after all, because they wish to attract the attention of the academy to areas of life, experiences and lines of inquiry in the human community, for which science and technique (cannot) do not provide any answers. A philosopher is a friend of wisdom (the *philos* of *Sophia*) because as a searching and inquiring human being he

²⁵ In a Christian perspective, only the truth can set you free (John 8,32), and truth is manifest in the Word become flesh, Jesus of Nazareth (John 1,17 ; 14,6).

²⁶ RATZINGER, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie* (n. 6), pp. 26-35. *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, pp. 34-39.

seeks to attain insight into the meaning of human existence. He pays heed to the fundamental questions of mankind and attempts to provide meaningful answers :

- the ultimate question whether the all too brief human existence in an infinity of history and of the cosmos is not absurd ;
- the question as to the possible meaning of an inescapable death ;
- the question of happiness ;
- the question as to when humans will finally receive justice in an inhuman and unjust world ;
- in brief : the question as the origin and final destiny of humanity and all that exists.

To address these questions is a task which, in spite of their different perspectives, philosophy and theology share. Attempting to answer questions surrounding the mystery of life entails being brave enough to direct one's thinking beyond the limits of the visible, the measurable and the verifiable. It demands that metaphysics and ontology are not simply pushed aside. This is why philosophy is the ally of theology, and why sufficient room must be made in the curriculum of a faculty of Catholic theology for philosophy courses.

3. The challenges facing a Faculty of Catholic Theology at Tilburg/Utrecht

In this last section we shall attempt to elaborate some of the concrete implications of our view concerning this new project in which we are collaborating, the establishment of the faculty of Catholic theology. At the KTU in the past, you have been dedicated to a theological formation of high quality, research, and church ministry. Undoubtedly this deserves our praise and respect. Yet the current situation and the history of the inception of the new faculty of Catholic theology invite us to single out various aspects

which we perceive as challenges to be addressed and faced together. We shall briefly mention four of these :

3.1. The balance between the ecclesial character and the scientific character of our project.

We have already pointed out that a theology faculty moves between the two poles of ecclesial faith and scientific reason. It must remain loyal to the community of the Church as well as to the ethos of its university setting. These are the two extremes of a paradox, both of which must nevertheless be upheld. In some cases this double demand of ecclesial loyalty and academic freedom may lead to tensions. Sometimes these tensions are the result of a unilateral emphasis on either Church supervision or academic freedom. It would be misleading to interpret the tensions in question in terms of power. All parties concerned, members of the magisterium as well as theologians, must take a measured approach to these matters and exercise self-control in the awareness that they are both at the service of God's people and that within this broader context both carry their particular responsibility. Contempt and/or suspicion of their respective ecclesial missions do nothing to alleviate this tension. A healthy balance in these matters must be sought at all times.

3.2. The founders of the new faculty have decided that the FCT will have two locations : Utrecht and Tilburg.

In my opinion this is also a challenge. Both institutions, the FKTU and the FRT, have, in the past, established their own traditions, their proper know how, and have developed their own specialties and focal points in their research and teaching. To some extent, these institutions have in the past been competitors. Events may have taken place that have created mutual suspicion. This chapter in our past must now come to an end. All that is valuable which both institutions have achieved in the past must now be brought together in and added to this new construct. We must join forces to begin something new. United we are stronger than if we were to continue to march to the beats of different drummers. This will demand imagination and creativity, but certainly also mobility.

3.3. A third challenge is the relation of the FCT to other institutions that engage in scientific theological research and instruction, in the Netherlands and abroad.

Catholic Netherlands did not succeed in creating one strong concentration of forces in one faculty of Catholic theology. Some apparently feared a re-denominationalization of theology, which, it should be remarked, is also taking place on the Protestant side with the establishment of the *Protestantse Theologische Universiteit* (PThU)²⁷. Marcel Sarot rightly raises the question whether this re-denominationalization is not in a part a reaction to the fact that not merely the general – non-ecclesial – but also ecclesial theology began to behave more and more ‘scientifically’ – with the result that there has been less and less room to practice ‘classical’ theology.²⁸ He notes that at the same time a certain generalization is taking place at universities : theology as a separate faculty disappearing, being subsumed into the more encompassing faculties of the ‘human sciences’. In my opinion, this evolution is logical. When theology is nothing more than religious studies, it no longer requires a separate faculty and may simply occupy its place among the human sciences. At any rate, the establishment of the FKT and the PThU provides the advantage that now there are places in which the classical or ecclesial theology may once again make itself known clearly and distinctly.

²⁷ On the 25th of January 2007, the Protestantse Theologische Universiteit (PThU) went public for the first time. This took place during a solemn ceremony in the cathedral of Utrecht. The PThU, with locations in Kampen, Leiden and Utrecht, officially started on the 1st of January. At the moment the general preparatory instruction will take three years, and the ecclesiastical training will also take three years. Marcel Sarot notes that the training of the clergy hereby becomes more denominational.

²⁸ Inaugural lecture “Quo vadis, regina?”, given in the aula of the academy building in Utrecht by Dr. Marcel Sarot on the occasion of his acceptance of the office of professor *extraordinarius* in the discipline of theology as a domain of science in the sub-faculty of religious studies at the faculty of the human sciences at the university of Utrecht, on the 7th of November 2006. Cf. his recent publication : *De goddeloosheid van de wetenschap*, Zoetermeer : Meinema, 2006.

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On the other hand the FKT has every reason to maintain close contact with the departments of religious studies and /or theology that have been integrated into the 'human sciences' in Tilburg, Nijmegen and the University of Utrecht, as well as with the Protestant Theological University with whom it has already entertained contacts in the past. These contacts have the advantage of confronting students with a broader and more diverse gamut of science and culture. It would not fare well if the three Catholic institutions pursue their own paths, ignore and belittle each other, fail to take each other seriously, or destroy each other through competition. The least we may expect is mutual cooperation and dialogue. The FKT for its part must therefore be willing to enter into conversation with the FGW (Faculty for Religious Science) in the context of the University of Tilburg and within the larger academic community.

Theology and the science of religion are not enemies. They are distinct from one another (in terms of field of research and method), yet they intersect in part, and are dependent on cooperation. Both can learn from one another. In theology, certain disciplines (the so called auxiliary sciences, for example : exegesis²⁹, church-history) are more closely related to the approaches taken in the religious sciences, whereas others (dogmatic and moral theology) constitute the core of theology because in their reflections they allow themselves to be 'normatively' guided by the belief (through faith) that God interacts with humankind in a particular fashion, wishes to invite humankind to a particular way of life, and ultimately does so in view of achieving humankind's salvation.

²⁹ In light of the pronouncement of the Second Vatican Council, that "the study of Holy Scripture must constitute the soul of sacred theology" (*Dei Verbum*, 24), one may, however, raise the question whether exegesis is indeed merely an 'auxiliary science', and whether a purely historical-religious model of exegesis is sufficient for a Faculty of Catholic Theology.

3.4. A fourth fact that deserves our attention is the commission that the FKT also serves in the training of priests and pastoral workers in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands.

As such it is at the service of the whole community of the Church and the broader society of the Netherlands. It will be our task to carefully consider the implications of this aim for instruction and research. The FKT will have to develop a form of practicing theology which permits identification with the living Catholic tradition, rather than avoid it ; it must develop a theology which not merely questions faith but also supports it. Among other things this will entail that our students be offered the possibility to become acquainted with those great Catholic theologians of antiquity, the Middle Ages, modernity and the contemporary era, who can nourish the life of faith of thinking Christians.³⁰

To my mind, another implication may be that first and foremost one will aim to provide students with broad basic theological training which will acquaint them with all the essential parts of the various fields of study. Only then will they be introduced into research in a specialized field. Therefore there must be a good balance between a general training and specialized research. After all, no one expects a pastor to be only a specialist in a small sub-domain of theology. Rather, it is expected that he be steeped in a broad theological culture, and only if possible would he have a further specialization in a particular domain of research.

Respected listeners, these are merely a few considerations I wish to submit to you. We hope that in the near future we may look at these together and exchange further ideas on these subjects. In closing, we briefly wish to formulate the main thesis of our talk : A fully fledged theology aims at a

³⁰ This may, among other things, mean that the work of one or other Catholic theologian may be taken as the subject of doctoral research (for example, J. H. Newman, R. Guardini, L. Bouyer, H. de Lubac ; Y. Congar ; H. Urs von Balthasar ; even exegetes like H. Schlier, H. Schürmann, R. Schnackenburg, R. Brown).

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‘catholicity’ that seeks to encompass all aspects of reality : Faith and reason, past and present, God and mankind, the individual and society, historicity and transcendence. These pairs of concepts may evoke tensions, but they form a paradox, not a contradiction. A truly catholic theology attempts to do justice to both aspects of the paradox, and does not choose exclusively one or the other side.

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