

From Reistic to Personalist Theology*

I wish to present my concept of a dogma and all the work in this subject. However, this is not an easy task, since one needs to be able to rise beyond one's own thinking and work and to present one's own meta-theological reflection. This is not just a theological method but a real methodology.

Usually, our scientific thinking and work is perceived by us in a slightly different way than by others, although not necessarily better. Authors tend to be uncritical towards their own work just as a mother would be towards her child. There is also the concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* raised by Hans Georg Gadamer that stands for a question whether a given concept or a given achievement is deeply embedded in history, in the environment; whether it has prospective followers and impact or whether it turns out to be dead at the moment of birth. Not only the man himself, but also his thoughts and work are subject to some outside verification, which is capricious at one time, yet very just at the other.

Theology of Reism

Like probably nearly all fields of science referring to ancient Greek thought, from the very beginning and until today, theology has been concerned not about the personal world but the world of things. Even God, who is called a person, in theology is actually presented as a thing and in reism using terms such as: light, beginning, mover, force, infinity, omnipotence... Indeed, at the beginning I was also (like others) a simple receiver of a dogmatic and fundamental theology standing for the discipline of reism, personal nature, one that imitates secular science about things. Furthermore, catechisms, textbooks, lectures and studies were also of such a nature. Therefore, I thought that at the time, I had knowledge

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analogous to logic, mathematics or astronomy similar to a huge and perpetual building, where only a few new elements were being given by individual theologians: small bricks on various themes bound to last forever. Meanwhile, even in the exact sciences, new theories emerge from time to time and sometimes there are turnarounds in mathematics, cosmology, physics, medicine and other areas. Therefore, theology must evolve; it cannot be limited solely to ancient Greek thought.

Theology and Faith

In the study of the concept of theology it is necessary to remember that theology and faith are strongly related to each other yet have fundamental differences, and therefore, theology is not faith. Meanwhile, some theologians, perhaps subconsciously, confuse theory with faith. Equally, scientific theology is generally associated with a self-contained, colloquial theology especially by ordinary believers; they all consider themselves theologians (at least to some extent) and judge theologians from the position of their alleged superiority. For example, a person might say, "I think that there is no hell" or "In my opinion, the Roman primacy is the usurpation of the Roman bishop." In addition, we might argue that even an atheist has his or her own 'personal' theology, which means antitheology, i.e. a theology that fights against ecclesial theology.

Scientific theology differs from ordinary presumptions and emotional judgments mainly because of the applied method and systemic approach. The method logically derives from all cognitive, revealed and natural sources, analyzes sentences and examines their functions and range. On the other hand, the system makes theorems more consistent and relevant; it puts them in a higher part and interprets them properly with a reference to reality.

As a result, faith is God's revealing to man in a personal way and faith realizing itself fully when man perceives God's interference and cooperates with Him in a conscious life. And this divine-human nature is unaffected, unchanging, most powerful (*actus fidei firmissimus*) and saving. On the other hand, theology as a human scientific elaboration of this faith is temporal, largely changeable, aspect-oriented and sometimes fallible. It is often mistakenly said that theology forms the truths of faith. This is not the case. The dogmas of faith are formed by faith, and theology only formulates them intellectually. When theology formulates some dogma in its own way, we do not believe in this formula but in what it expresses in faith. In other words, we do not believe in a theological opinion, but we believe in reality that is expressed in that opinion. This faith is already a relationship to God of an entire person, and not just the mind.

Towards a more Complete Theological Concept

Generally, theological concepts are adopted from great schools, old and modern alike, such as Augustinism, Thomism, Scotism, Christian existentialism, Phenomenology and others. Most theologians stop at this point, not having any ambition to complement these concepts or to create a new one. However, some theologians sometimes create their own theological concepts, like their own style in art or literature during their long-term practice of the subject. That is why I warn young theologians against writing didactic textbooks at the beginning of their academic career. At the end of your life you will be ashamed of the fact that you have written a work of a school-like nature, shallow and in many points wrong, and, above all, someone else's and immature. It is a paradox that it is more difficult to write a textbook than a monograph, yet meanwhile, textbooks are generally not considered as scientific achievements.

Intellectual Basis

Theology came to me from intellectual grounds, thought, philosophy. The sphere of the heart, devotion, and church functionality came later. Theology grew mainly from the issue of God, His existence and all His mystery. As I can see in reflexive publications, many theologians begin with considering rather the revealed and detailed truths, and only after do they perceive general and intellectual problems, going beyond the supernatural faith itself. Today, I give most value to theology which uses mainly the philosophy in the form of a great system; although I know that systems have become unfashionable in western countries.

Towards Systematic Theology

A true dogmatic theology should be systematic. Forms of non-systematic theology, such as kerygmatic, narrative, hermeneutical, linguistic and entirely historical theology do not have such a scientific value. They can only be helpful in systematic theology. Great theologians are usually associated with great mental and philosophical systems, namely, St. Justin and St. Irenaeus of Lyons are associated with stoicism, Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite with Neoplatonism, St. Augustine with the third Platonic school and stoicism, St. Thomas Aquinas with Aristotelianism, Bl. Jan Duns Scotus with Augustinianism and

partially with Aristotelianism, Karl Rahner with Neo-Kantianism and existentialism, Hans Urs von Balthasar with the philosophy of beauty and Neo-Gnosticism, Hans Georg Gadamer and Wolfhart Pannenberg with post idealistic historicism, John Paul II with Thomism enriched with Phenomenology, Benedict XVI with Augustinian personalism, etc.

Today, many theologians are moving away from great systems towards pragmatism, psychologism and sociologism. Many of them believe that the proliferation of schemes introduces skepticism into theology and fragmentation in faith. Some consider one or the other system to be blameworthy, such as P. Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionism. However, I think that the multitude of systems enriches the Christian theology because all our cognition of religious mysteries is only aspect-oriented. Such pluralism in the church is desirable. However, one theologian should follow a single system, because eclecticism is of low value. Other systems may serve only as an aid to certain concepts, solutions or innovations.

Of course, all systems in the Church should be based on the same foundations of faith but only one leading system ensures consistency, legibility and correctness. Some say that, for example the sentence "The Word made flesh" (J1:14) is equally understood in each system, which is not true. The very concepts of "God," "man," "the Word," "flesh," "to make" are dependent in their meanings on the system, not to mention whole passages of the Bible. Thus, the system ensures cohesion, logic, unambiguity, consistency, depth of approach and consistent reference to practice. In short, both theological concept and theological creation without a system, even if embraced and implicit, may not have a greater value or any value whatsoever.

Emergence of Personalism

After John Paul II had read my work *Personalism*, he asked in his letter, "Is personalism a system or does it use systems, such as Thomism or phenomenology?" (Castel Gandolfo, 5 August 1995). This is an important issue. Can personalism not be created as an original system?

Personalism is a system in itself. In philosophy, there were several outside Poland, though in a rather idealistic approach, in the spirit of an idealistic philosophy. However, there is no personalism applied in theology. I think that in Poland there is a need to create realistic personalism and refer it to theology also. Thus, it would be a philosophical-theological system with a universal range. The term personalism has two basic meanings that are usually confused

in Poland. A distinction can be made between anthropological personalism and personalism as a system. Anthropological personalism is simply a science concerned with man as a person. This science is either embedded in a separate system (even Marxism considers itself humanism) or all reality is reduced only to a human being, as in the case of extreme forms of existentialism, Józef Bańko's recentivism and other, or any systemic thought is set aside in general. In this approach, the personalist is any Catholic theologian and everyone who accepts that every human is a person and who examine the phenomenon of a human person.

However, anthropological personalism itself, without being connected to the whole system, remains undefined, amorphous and ambiguous depending on the general direction. Therefore, there is a need for personalism as a system that also deals with the phenomenon of a man as a person, but this phenomenon, given directly to every human being, takes all reality as a starting point and support for the vision and constitutes a concept of existence. It is called universalistic personalism. In fact, it is a philosophical system but also a fundamentally creative one for theology as a whole.

Formation of the Theology of Personalism

Personalistic theory stems undoubtedly from a person's experience of the world in relation to Divine Persons and is rooted in the individual person. However, it is not personal and relative in Catholicism, which is mainly due to the identity of each person's nature, the ability of objective perceptions and, above all, the fact he or she is rooted in a community (*communio personarum*). Although there is a temptation to create a theology that would be detached from the community of believers, a proper Catholic theology is present primarily in the community, that is, the Church. The Church, however, does not deny the individual form of theology, but rather postulates, makes it objective and authenticates it. Thus, a creative correlation is formed between the individual form of theology and the ecclesial form. As a result, Catholic theology is not only individual or exclusively social.

The phenomenon of a person, which cannot be expressed completely, appears as a kind of a being and existence, and at the same time, as the very core of reality and the key to the understanding and interpretation of reality. So far, philosophical theories have been based on either recognizing only the body in a human being, thus giving rise to materialism, or only appreciating the soul, which provided the basis for the formation of idealism. Personalism sees

the whole person as a being that is a union of the body and the soul, but also grows beyond them, creating an over-synthesis of the body and the soul; to put it more vividly, it is like a rainbow of being above the physical and the spiritual reality. Today, Thomists generally identify a person with a soul, although St. Thomas himself did not and even though in the fourth and fifth centuries the Church still distinguished between the soul and the person of Jesus Christ, against the Priscillianists. A person, both individual and social, recapitulates in himself (herself) all reality, he (she) reflects it, summarizes, interprets, lives it, it develops creativity in it and makes sense, and consequently is the only subject of religious life, including theology in the world. Everything else in the world is apersonal, although the person is in an actual relationship with it (see: my *Personalizm*, Lublin 1995, Warsaw 2000, *Szkice do systemu personalizmu*, Lublin 200, and others).

Systematic Universality

The system undoubtedly provides a universal perspective and a coherent method at the same time. You can practically do theology to a certain extent and be a so-called 'expert' in, for example, Christology, Mariology, Sacramentology, etc. but it is even better if the work is connected, even subconsciously and implicitly to a system. It is critical that the basic Protestant hermeneutic principle is applied in theology, which means that every biblical book must be translated in the context of the whole Bible, and this whole is to be interpreted in the light of each individual book. That is why Karl Rahner was right, who on the one hand deliberately did not write textbooks, and, moreover, did not limit himself to only a few special sections of theology, as he dealt with all of theology. Thus, the modern linguistic principle seems right that some text detached from the proper whole does not make sense, and therefore a theological sentence, which is detached from the entire system, at least accepted implicitly, does not make any sense.

Integrality

I think that today, personalism gives one of the best perspectives for interpreting the Christian being, mainly by creating an over-synthesis over the physical and spiritual sides, as well as the temporal and saving reality. Christianity is neither just the physical nor only a doctrine, nor is it just the spirit. Let us

take the example of the interpretation of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are only two positions in theology on this matter. According to the first, the Resurrection was a subjective, internal and psychological phenomenon of faith of Jesus' disciples; according to the other, it was an empirical-historical event of a physical nature that is materially verifiable. Both these interpretations that exist in theology are wrong. They lack the dimension of personal existence that is neither only carnal nor only spiritual or religious, but over-synthesized. Thus, the Resurrection of Jesus must be explained as a realistic event, even more realistic than the body, yet occurring in the Person of Jesus and in His communication with His disciples or other people.

This approach can be adopted to explain other dilemmas. Sin is not only a matter of the body or just the human psyche, but a matter of a given person and his or her mystery. Jesus performed the salvific process not only physically or only through consciousness and will, but through His entire Person. This work is not actually implemented until a man accepts the work of Jesus in his or her whole person, both materially and spiritually. Without this perception on the part of a human being, the work of Redemption would not be real. St. Augustine said that everyone who was baptized really gave birth to Jesus Christ. Baptism as a sacrament is not only a phenomenon of water or the power of the sound of words but it is an empirical sign through which (as Divine Revelation promised) the Divine Persons give themselves to the human person. Similarly, you can explain all theological problems in personal terms (see: *Metodologia teologiczna*, Lublin 1998, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, 2 vol., Lublin 1999-2003, and others).

Theology of Earthly Realities

Universalistic theology of personalism is not limited to God and man in the redeeming and salvific aspects, but also strives to grasp all reality in its aspect (at least secondarily). This is a theology of earthly realities. It is a theology that transcends the area of Revelation itself *ad intra* and concludes from it some content or cognitive and intellectual lights for temporal reality, which is usually considered non-religious. Such conclusions from the Revelation can be abundant. They do not share the level of secular science and do not invalidate their real cognitions; on the contrary, they can be supported by secular science and they create some firmament, some transcending vault, some high rainbow over cognitions and temporal sciences. For example, the truth about God's creation of the world results in a different view of the world and life on it; the truth about

the creation and redemption of a man results in relevant social and political conclusions, such as dignity, equality, freedom and others; the truth about eternal life of a human being results in an appropriate morality and practice, etc. These conclusions, even if not always clear and absolute, are strongly connected with so-called natural theology. Therefore, theology as a whole, both supernatural and natural, is neither closed *in sola anima* nor is it a desertion from the world of thought and science, nor a blank escape from atheism; instead, it throws (even if only a secondary) light on all temporality. Over time, it is recognized in the form of a theology of different areas, from which the light of theology is to be removed and hence, a theology of the world, matter, history, nation, culture, society, politics, family, work, literature, arts, sport, a woman, etc. I have been dealing with almost all of these branches of concluding theology, sometimes referring to it as “external theology” (I wrote many works on these subjects). In this sense, Catholic theology is universal. Admittedly, there were (and still are) attempts to expel theology beyond all temporality in the direction of abstraction or psychology. Just the influence of moral theology or Christian ethics on temporality is allowed but the influence of Christian thought on all reality, as it used to be at origins of Christianity, is needed to be rebuilt. Perhaps, this can be best done by means of personalist theology, which neither mixes nor equates the temporal and saving orders, nor does it break them up, but rather binds them into a higher whole.

Praxeological Dimension

After centuries of theoretical theology, the times of practical theology are coming; theology (as William Ockham wanted) that is considered to be the only proper theology is the practical, applicable theology connected to empiricism. In turn, only faith concerns transcendence. This is the case not only in America today, where there is a complete intellectual and theoretical desert in theology but also in Western Europe and even in Germany, where until now systematic theology has been practiced. How does personalism solve this? Theoretical theology is inseparable from practical theology. Theory and praxis strictly correlate in theology. In the meantime, we know how theology students, especially seminarians, who are should fulfill their priest’s ministry in the future, complain about the treatise on the Holy Trinity that it is difficult theology, actually unnecessary, and has nothing to do with pastoral work. According to personalism, however, there is no more a praxeological treatise than the treaty of the Trinity. Trinitology defines the entire Christian *praxis*. Of course,

it is not the point that theoretical theology is a set of rules or a vademecum for practical activities. Here, the role of the creative medium is the individual who transposes the theoretical sentence into practice, and the practice complements the theory in some aspect. Hence, it follows that a one-dimensional approach i.e. the omission of theoretical theology in favor of praxeological theology, or vice versa: the omission of praxeological theology in favor of the theoretical one is a dangerous thing for Christianity.

Of course, we need to catch up with the theological praxeology we have neglected under the influence of ancient Greek philosophy, which still lives in some directions, for example in Thomistic theology. The praxeological usefulness and usability also belong to the truth, the good and the beauty of theology. Following 1 Tm 4:8, “piety is useful for everything,” it must be said that theology is useful for everything at some level. It is necessary for strengthening faith, for realizing salvation, for personal life, for spiritual life, for broadening the horizons of our thought, for achieving universal visions of reality, for building a better society, for shaping a true material and spiritual culture, etc. Christian thought must be useful and helpful for shaping a more perfect society, country and nation, for saving the homeland in difficult times, for the reconstruction of the morality of society and for the great construction of a prophetic, universal world. Catholic theology is not shameful, narrow and it does not resemble a hidden parish. If Christian theology had not contributed to these matters and if the Church had not had the appropriate reflex for temporal use, then there would be no need for such a theology and such a Church in this world, it would only be some idealistic banter. It is precisely the Catholic personalistic theology that serves primarily the salvific reality, but it must serve a secondarily temporal reality because man himself is still temporal, and temporality and saving communicate in the unity of the person.

There is nothing ontically more perfect than a person and nothing more perfect than a person can be even thought of. Personal existence, three-person, and somehow socio-personal is the essence of God Himself. This is why personalistic theology appears to be a new theology for our time.