

**PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY:  
CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES**

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*Fides et Ratio* compares faith and reason—as also philosophy and theology—and clearly stands for their harmony. This by itself is nothing really new in the history of Catholic theology or official church teaching. The author most enthusiastically quoted by the document—Thomas Aquinas—will surprise no one who knows the history of this dialectic.

This tradition, going back to St. Thomas or even earlier, is noted not only for admitting the congruence between faith and reason, but also for a deep faith in human reason. In Aquinas, and those who hold a similar view, there is a robust sense of the goodness of human nature and a deep trust in the power of human intelligence to reach the truth. The view of human nature espoused by this trend is more optimistic than, say, the one to which Saint Augustine or later Martin Luther subscribe. Implied in the difference are different views of human nature and different theologies on the impact of original sin and on what it means to be saved. If a theologian holds that original sin deeply corrupted human beings, robbing us of the very capacity to reason correctly, so that we are crippled beyond hope without the help of grace, then such a thinker will have scant regard for the power of unaided human reason. If, instead, the view held is that original sin, while being a fall, did not drastically handicap human nature, and that human beings retained their innate capacity to judge, think and reach valid conclusions, then such a position would certainly be more optimistic about the role of reason in general.

In this paper, I would like to say a word on the continuities between faith and reason, and on their differences. I will dwell longer on the differences, since the harmony is already strongly stressed in the document.

## 1. Continuities between Reason and Faith

The most basic argument for the harmony of faith and reason is the obvious truth that both come from God, and cannot intrinsically be opposed to each other. Not only do both come from God; they are both valid paths which lead us to God. The order of priority is, however, clear. Faith is obviously the senior and more respected partner.

Even on this point, however, there have been, historically, quite a lot of quarrels. During the controversy that raged in the fourteenth century about Latin Averroism—called more correctly “Heterodox Aristotelianism”—there was the issue of “double truth.” Heterodox Aristotelians took Aristotle to be *the* philosopher par excellence, and the very incarnation of reason. If they found an apparent conflict between one of Aristotle’s views and a doctrine of faith, they would hold both to be true—one “according to reason and to Aristotle, and the other according to faith.” This may strike us as strange and untenable—as it did seem to most theologians in the University of Paris in the fourteenth century—but an influential group of medieval scholars did subscribe to such a view.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from this largely discredited view, most Christian scholars have subscribed to the harmony of faith and reason. But they have differed in the relative importance they assign to each field, and to the way the two are brought together in theology or in real life. Don’t we ourselves know believers and religious writers who are strongly for building the human to support the spiritual quest, and others who see reasoning, questioning or the promotion of the human as a serious threat to the journey of faith?

In the document under study—*Fides et Ratio*—philosophy is once again referred to as the handmaid of theology. Philosophy asks questions, and provides tools which theologians make use of for elaborating theological thought. Thus, we have Augustine’s use of Neoplatonic thought, Aquinas’s use of Aristotle’s categories, or, more recently, Karl Rahner’s recourse to the insights of Kant and Heidegger.

Two things need to be pointed out in this regard, things mentioned only very briefly in *Fides et Ratio*.

One is the stand taken by theologians like Rahner, that “the monogamy is over,” that is, philosophy is not, and need not be, the only partner for theology.<sup>2</sup> Today’s theology, to take Rahner’s method, for instance, must start with the questions of contemporary men and women; and since their world is mediated through the sciences, theology needs to enter into a serious dialogue with the sciences.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, philosophy plays a more restricted role in the elaboration of theology than it did, for instance, in the case of neo-scholastic theology. Think, for instance, of liberation theology. It makes uses of social analysis much more than of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Similar statements could be made about feminist theology and spirituality,<sup>5</sup> or about Dalit theology.<sup>6</sup>

Let us go back a moment to the author most quoted in the document. We can learn precious lessons in approach, method and preferred thematic from the bold stand taken by Thomas Aquinas. What he did, among other things, was to be open to the secular learning that hit and shook Europe and Christian civilization in his days, namely, the discovery of the works of Aristotle. To make matters more complicated for Christian theologians, the Aristotelian corpus and great studies on it came to the Christian West through the Arabs, who were Moslems, and in conflict with Christian Europe. Great theologies are born by confronting the current culture and its icons, methods and challenges head on, not by running away, not by rejection, not by burying our heads in the sand of an ecclesiastical ghetto.

What are the areas of secular learning today that theology needs to dialogue with? If the medieval university had four faculties—arts, theology, law and medicine—today’s spectrum of subjects and areas of investigation are so many more, and with such a wide variety of methods. The theologian needs to address this world, listen to its questions and anxieties, and engage in a constructive and intelligent discourse which the secular interlocutor can both understand and respect. Too much theology is born and discussed among the “converted”—among those who already hold positions identical with, or very similar to, the speaker’s. Most theologians are not seriously and consistently in dialogue with scholars from other fields.

Given the literally mind-boggling spectrum of specializations today, no one person can grasp, or, much less, master the whole field of academia, or even a sizable portion of it. One can only bite off a small bit (this is what specialists do), or form part of a team (as, for instance, when a team of scripture scholars come together to prepare a biblical commentary). The type of field-encompassing work that Jerome or Aquinas did would be foolhardy to attempt today.

The other point is this: While the document mentions cultural pluralism with respect, and makes particular mention of India's culture, there is always the danger that in judging the orthodoxy of a particular theology, the criteria developed in another cultural context are used, either exclusively, or predominantly. Most of what we call Christian theology is a Western product. It reflects the thinking patterns, the concerns, the cultural matrix of a *small* part of the world—which, quite unfairly, set itself as the norm for all—which abrogated to its use the greatest part of the earth's material resources and tended to judge everyone else on its own criteria. This was certainly the case during most of the colonial period, and this "colonial" mentality still operates in a number of people in the church even today. Haven't we heard of ethnocentrism, or Europe-centred ways of looking at the church and at theology? To quote just one instance, a theology elaborated in Germany or France was simply called theology (and by implication good for world-wide consumption). A theology elaborated in Latin America was instead called Latin American theology (as if it is not good enough for the first world.)

We, in India, are right now in the process of elaborating creative methods for doing theology.<sup>7</sup> There is no one Indian theology; there are, rather, different methods and attempts that call themselves Indian, or identify themselves more with local languages and cultures. We need to try various methods and paths, listen to the voices of our religious traditions and the needs of our most marginalized groups, precisely to be faithful to the gospel and to the Christian tradition. In this adventure, we will make mistakes and can certainly learn much from the example of our sister churches elsewhere, and be fruitfully challenged by theologies developed in other countries. What Thomas Aquinas did in Europe

in the thirteenth century, we still need to do in India—with the same courage, openness and fidelity. Like him, we too may be misunderstood in the process. However, if Indian theology is not to become a mere footnote to European theology, but an adult contribution to the church's theological endeavour, it must seek its own avenues, both creatively and faithfully—of course in dialogue with world theology, in respectful obedience to the church's teaching authority, and never betraying the urgent concerns of that group of people for whom the Gospel is above all meant, namely, the poor and the forgotten.

## **2. Discontinuities**

When we compare faith and reason, we are not comparing merely two modes or sources of knowledge. We are comparing a way of *knowing* with a committed way of *living*. While philosophy is mainly a way of knowing, of interpreting reality in search of meaning, faith refers to one's whole way of orienting one's life in response to one's belief system.

Within the life of faith, the intellectual element—the assent—is only a part; it cannot by any means be the whole. The most erudite scholar and the least intelligent man or woman can be a person of deep faith. Both the Nobel Prize winner and the mentally handicapped illiterate person can belong to the same community of faith.

For faith refers to three aspects of a person's central attitudes and decisions—to one's *trust* in the Ultimate (God), to one's acceptance of a set of *truths*, and to being committed to a way of *living*. If you want to use a mnemonic to keep it in mind, faith contains three C's: *confidence, content and commitment*. (And they make sense within another C, namely, the *community* of faith. Theology is always a community-related activity.) In fact, if we look at Jesus' stories of the last judgement, nothing is asked about one's intellectual positions, or even about one's religious views; what matters is how one lived. One's faith is best seen in the way one lives, not in the statements one makes. This committed life, as we know, can go with great intellectual acumen and with a feeble

mind. While our IQ can be tested and graded, none of us can know the level of faith of each of the members of a community. The person of greatest faith among our acquaintances may be a brilliant scientist or a dancer or a sweeper.

Theology is not just a mental construct built upon an intellectual capital called “the deposit of faith” and the tools taken from a culture’s philosophical categories. Theology is committed reflection on one’s faith experience and that of one’s community. So, unlike philosophy, only a person living the Catholic faith can be a Catholic theologian, and only a convinced Moslem can be a Moslem theologian. Without this faith experience and committed life, including committed relationships with the community, you can have a sociologist of religion, or a philosopher of religion, but not a theologian.

Rahner, for example, would say that all his theology flows out of the spiritual exercises. For Gutierrez, theology can only be a secondary exercise. The primary things—in importance and in logical order—are one’s faith experience and one’s commitment to people. Only on this twofold love can one build a theology. Otherwise, one has nothing to theologize about.<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, theology is a very different kind of intellectual enterprise from philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

I would like to highlight some other basic differences between the two.

Theology makes no sense without reference to a particular religious tradition. It is the critical reflection by specially qualified members on the faith experience and tradition of a particular faith community. That community exists because it shares common beliefs and a common tradition, and takes seriously the claims made by the founder (as in the case of Christianity or Islam or Buddhism) or by early texts (as in the case of Hinduism). Everything the community says about itself or about the foundational experience cannot be proved rationally. Thus we cannot “prove” to an outsider the reality of original sin or the meaning of the Resurrection, nor can a Moslem prove to us that the Koran is the word of God, as they understand it. In fact, behind all religious traditions, and hence at the heart of any theology, is a central claim: that there was a

special and unique *experience*.

Thus, if Jesus was nothing more than another human being, you and I are thoroughly misled. If the Resurrection accounts of the early Christians were delusions, we are, as St. Paul tells us, people most to be pitied. Even within our Christian tradition, we further trust the testimony of individuals who claim to have had God-experiences. Thus, if Ignatius's claims to have experienced God are fake, the Jesuits would be a group of misled individuals. If I do not believe that Don Bosco was led by God, I would be a fool to belong to the Salesian congregation—or, at best, I would be merely a social worker with a religious tag. The Missionaries of Charity observe "Inspiration Day" each year—recalling the day when Mother Teresa is said to have received the inspiration ("a call within a call," as she put it) to leave the Loretto Sisters and go out among the poorest.

Such central claims cannot be checked and proved, either by followers or by outsiders. For philosophy, such privileged claims would make no sense. Philosophy's strength and nobility, its truly catholic appeal, is that the only authority is that of reason. Anyone can say anything, provided he or she can prove it. No one can claim special revelations, or a special status. And, to be honest, one must always admit the possibility that one may be wrong. When a famous philosopher—I think it was Russell—was asked whether he would be willing to die for his convictions, he replied: "No, I may be wrong."

A good illustration of a philosopher's attitude to truth and certainty is given in Bertrand Russell's "Ten Commandments." In the line of Socrates, Kant and other pioneering thinkers, Russell lays down certain basic norms for our search:

"The philosopher Socrates ignored his accusers and steadfastly obeyed the command of Apollo, the god of reason. The philosopher Kant ignored the accusers of his day and called for the courage to use one's own reason. The Philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) interpreted the meaning of Apollo for our own time:

1. Do not be certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worthwhile to produce belief by concealing

evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.

3. Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.

4. When met with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavour to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.

5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.

6. Do not use power to suppress opinion you believe to be pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.

7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.

8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.

9. Be scrupulously truthful, even when truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.

10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fools' paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness."<sup>10</sup>

This is very different from the position of the believer, for whom the martyr is the most convinced and the most convincing believer. We do not imply that the martyrs had all their intellectual questions worked out in their head; but they believed in something or Someone strongly enough to stake everything they had on that faith. This is in many ways the opposite of the perennial skeptic.

Underlying this basic difference are two very different ways of understanding experience. Both philosophy and theology go back to experience, but in very, very different ways. Let us see how.

### **3. The Different Meanings of “Experience”**

Philosophy starts with what is called “ordinary” human experience, in which there are no privileged observers or specialized instruments. In this, it differs from theology and from experimental science. Philosophers discuss aspects of human experience which anyone can check for oneself. Thus, we see the ancient Greeks discussing the trustworthiness of sense knowledge, or Aristotle exploring the meaning of friendship in the *Nichomachean Ethics*,

or Karl Marx calling our attention to the widespread experience of exploitation of the masses by powerful elites. In each of these, anyone with normal physical and mental abilities can check out the facts. One need not make an act of trust in the speaker to hold the veracity of what is being said. The debate on the reliability of sense knowledge can be illustrated with examples which even a child can follow (like the famous example of a stick appearing bent when seen through water). Aristotle's descriptions of the true and false friendship can very well fit our experiences. Marx, in his turn, was giving voice to the bitter experiences of large numbers of people.

The core experience on which religion and theology rest belongs to a very different category. To accept Jesus as God, for instance, is "scandal to the Jews and folly to the Greeks," as the well-educated Paul realized. The Damascus experience which changed the self-righteous persecutor of Jesus' followers into a passionate lover of Christ cannot be proved or explained. In fact, even after reading an "account" of it (which can never be a description) we do not know what Saul/Paul experienced.

What did the Vedic seers see? What did Gautama experience that turned him into the Buddha? What made the illiterate Mohammed a powerful messenger of God? What did Teresa of Avila glimpse? What exactly is John of the Cross saying when he writes about the Beloved and the Dark Night? What did Mahatma Gandhi hear when he listened to the Inner Voice?

None of us really know the answer to these questions. But, as Bergson used to say, philosophers, as seekers of the truth, cannot ignore the fact that some of the best human beings, whose influence on society has been great and beneficial, have claimed to be led by such experiences.<sup>11</sup>

In his much-quoted work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, philosopher-psychologist William James takes a respectful look at mystical experience. Among other things, he lists the characteristics of religious (mystical) experience. These special experiences, he said, are *ineffable* (they cannot be described), passive (they happen to a person; they are not the person's own doing); transitory (not continuous). Another quality he found is

that they bring with it a *certainty* of their own. The mystic's inner certainty does not come from the correctness of his/her formulations, but from what he/she has seen. This is miles away from the kind of attitude described by Russell.<sup>12</sup>

So, too, James said, mystical experience was *noetic*, that is, it brings knowledge, but in a different way from what we normally call knowledge. What it brings is not new information, or quantitative knowledge (information added to what we already know), but a whole new way of knowing. To quote an example: After his experiences at Manresa, Ignatius of Loyola said he understood so many things clearly, as he had not understood them through years of study. He felt that God had instructed him as a teacher instructs a pupil. This type of knowledge cannot be explained to someone else. It is not "public knowledge." It cannot be directly described, examined or critiqued. This article, for instance, belongs to the public realm. You can check my sources. You can decide whether what I am saying is logical. You can agree with, or differ from, my conclusions, depending on the strength or the weakness of the evidence I offer. All this cannot be done with Mother Teresa's "call within a call" or with Augustine's conversion experience or Ramakrishna's ecstatic religiosity.

Why bring in mystical knowledge here? For a simple reason. Theology is the language of a faith community in talking about its experience and doctrines. If theology loses touch with its mystical moorings, it is reduced to empty talk. Not just that; a theologian who is not, to some degree at least, a mystic, does not really know what the words mean. He/she becomes a merchant of words, or the defender of an ideology rather than an explorer of a faith.

Philosophers (like Russell or Kant or Heidegger) can bring to theology their tools, their honest questioning. Theology is public discourse, and cannot remove itself from honest questioning. Theology is not the same as revelation. It is the work of human beings, and must submit itself to the rules of correct discourse and honest confrontation. This is, after all, how new theologies are born. They do not fall from the sky, readymade; they are human responses to new situations and new challenges.<sup>13</sup> The challenges

and the questions (as well as the tools for solving them) may come from philosophy, social sciences, literary studies, or other fields.

#### **4. Philosophy, Religion and the Arts**

At the World Conference of Religion held in Kochi in the 1980's, Father Barboza, a trained Bharatanatyam dancer, gave a dance on a Christian theme. Most of us professors see such events as relaxation, or as minor additions to the "real serious stuff," namely, our discussions and papers. One day, during the group discussion, one of the Hindu scholars told us: "I learned more about your religion from that dance than from the papers in the sessions." Many of us wondered what he meant. What did the dance convey that the learned papers had not?

Philosophy and theology are largely left brain activities, dealing with concepts, theories and discursive reasoning. The whole world of aesthetics, beauty and feeling is largely left out. In fact, some of the most moving expressions of religious faith are not found in theological and philosophical seminars, but in a prayerful liturgy, in a moving procession, in good singing, in great works of art. There is much more to religion than dogmas and doctrines.<sup>14</sup>

In a British study of adolescents and religion, a group of boys were given the chance to participate in different types of prayer services. Some included meaningful explanations of religious doctrines. When asked to rate the different services, the boys chose the service in which the music moved them as the most devotional.<sup>15</sup>

Human beings are apparently moved more by emotion than by concepts. Or, if concepts move them, it is largely because these are capable of provoking deep emotion.

The whole emotional and aesthetic side of religious life and practice is largely ignored by philosophers and theologians. It does not have to be. When Thomas Aquinas preached to the simple people of Naples in their dialect, they were moved to tears. Maybe we are taking a small part of the total personality of such great men, and reducing them to dry and lifeless caricatures. If the professor's sermon sounds like a seminar paper, or if he celebrates Mass with as much (or as little) personal involvement as a purely

theoretical discussion, the fault is not with theology, but with inadequate personal integration. Human beings are, after all, much more than sophisticated computers. One-dimensional people are not only unappealing human beings; they are also unfit to become great theologians or philosophers.

I have been highlighting the different understandings of experience in philosophy and religion, and contrasting the mystic's inner certainty with the philosopher's endless questioning (which must be respected). But at one level, the mystic and the philosopher are twin souls and understand each other well.

That level is this. Both the deep thinker and the deep mystic have seen the limit of words and concepts, and feel the inadequacy of human language and mental gymnastics to picture the truth. The "*neti, neti*" of Sankara, or Aquinas's conclusion, "This is to know God—that we are aware that we do not know Him" (*Hoc est Deum cognoscere, quod scimus nos ignorare de Deo quid sit*), Saint Ignatius's insistence, *Deus semper maius*, that is, "God is always greater (than anything we can know or say about God)"—such pearls of wisdom will find a respectful response in the great philosophers. Deep thinkers suspect easy answers and the certainties that come from shallow thinking. In some sense, the mystic and the agnostic are closer than we suspect. Both have seen through the inadequacy of knowledge and words. Both are aware how much ignorance our so-called learning contains. As Rahner would insist, the human being's basic awareness is that of mystery. In being aware of a few islands of knowledge, we cannot but glimpse even more sharply the immense ocean of mystery.

In this honest admission of our ignorance, of the littleness of our conquests, the philosopher and the mystic come together. Both challenge the easy assertions of superficial theologians who may forget that God is not a tidy formula. Explaining why a number of his colleagues do not take religious writers seriously, one scientist wrote: "Some religious people write as if they know more about God and spiritual matters than a scientist claims to know about a bug." This cocksureness, this blissful unawareness of one's limitations and the consequent claims of certainty—well, that is hard for any thinking person to take seriously. Just as the mystic

insists that one's experience is ineffable, and is painfully aware of the poverty of words and concepts, the serious scholar is honestly aware of how little one knows, how much more there is to know, and how inadequate our tools are.

The philosopher and the mystic respect each other in their awareness of limit and the readiness to move beyond comfortable formulae. They part company in this, that, while philosophers (like Kant or Heidegger or Russell) see the inadequacy of traditional answers and see more questions than answers, the mystic sees the darkness as filled by a Presence, which he/she cannot describe, but which has made Itself felt. It is a "dazzling darkness," to use a favourite expression of some mystics; it is life-giving and brings with it its own kind of certainty. Hence the use of symbol, story and paradox by mystics to give expression to what cannot really be captured by the mind or by the rules of grammar and logic.

Religions are vehicles for this self-transforming inner experience. They are like rusty pipes bringing us life-giving water. We need the water, and hence the pipes. But there are no perfect pipes. The life-giving water gets mixed up with rust and grime and rubbish. Theologies are like tool kits for maintaining the pipes. They are not the source of the living water.

For those who have discovered the original source of the water, the pipes are secondary, and may even be discarded. Theologies, rituals, structures, regulations and dogma are, in this sense, mediations and tools—necessary in the normal course of events, but to be transcended. It is water that quenches our thirst, not the pipes, however elaborate they may be, and however clever their construction. It may be good to remember cases like that of the brilliant Aquinas who, once he glimpsed the Real in an essentially incommunicable personal experience, refused to write any further. "All that I have written," he is said to have told a friend who pleaded with him to complete the *Summa*, "seems to be like so much straw."

For those who have not glimpsed that Other Shore, the straw may be everything they have found, and it may even appear like gold. Or one may be frustrated at not finding something more meaningful, as it seems to have happened to an earnest seeker like

Albert Camus.

Moving to a conclusion on the relationships among philosophy, theology and spirituality, this is what we can say:

Human reason is the best tool we have for understanding ourselves, each other and the world around us. It is by no means a tool to be despised. (For, even if one were to despise reason, one would have to have reasons for such contempt, and those reasons would have to be elaborated by the same mind that we suspect.). Relentless quest, discovery, growth, progress—all this belongs to the greatness of the human race. Apart from moving us from beast-like lives to what we call civilization today, it also saves us from fanaticism, exploitation and regression. In fact, as Jiddu Krishnamurti insists, we always trust our reason; for, even when I decide to trust someone else (such as, a person, or a newspaper, or a religious authority), I basically trust the soundness of my own mind in coming to such a decision. So, no human inquiry is possible without adequate trust in human reason.

That there are many questions raised by reason which reason cannot answer, is obvious. E.g., Why are you and I alive and in good health, while others die before us, or are afflicted with cancer or leprosy? In such matters, philosophers remind us to be honest and not to accept consoling myths just to comfort ourselves. (Think of the critique of religion by Feuerbach, Marx and Freud). We should also avoid claiming to know what we really do not know. As a professor of theology once told us, when anyone (including a theologian) makes an assertion, the hearer has the right to ask: “How do you know the truth of what you said just now?” We cannot escape rational inquiry by appealing to authority or mystery or “faith” (To tell someone things like, “If you had more faith, you would not ask such questions,” is both an insult and an escape).

Questions—that is something all of us have. And the wiser and deeper persons among us will have more questions and perhaps deeper anguish than the rest. In this, two avenues are open to us. One is the classical saying of the Greeks that “it is better to be a dissatisfied Socrates than a contented pig.” That is, it is the mark of wisdom to move beyond easy answers and to be on a relentless search.<sup>16</sup>

The other answer comes from the mystic. Great and deep human beings like Ramana Maharshi and John of the Cross, Paul of Tarsus and Francis of Assisi, have touched the depth of human reality and seen beyond it in a way they could not describe<sup>17</sup>. That is a level we cannot learn through discussion and mere cleverness. At this very personal and deepest level, it is not a matter of arguing; it is a matter of sight. Just as a theology that protects itself from the bold questions of philosophy and the sciences would be shallow and useless, any religious exploration that did not nourish itself at the sources through direct experience runs the risk of ending up as mere chatter. Or as self-serving power games. History has shown us examples of both.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J.T. Mannath, *Harvey of Nedellec's Proofs for the Existence of God: "De Cognitione Primi Principii, QQ. III-IV"* (Rome: Salesian Pontifical University, 1969) 6-7. Some masters in the faculty of arts posited two sets of opposing conclusions: conclusions to be held *secundum fidem et veritatem* and those that are valid *secundum viam Aristotelis et Commentatoris*.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Current Relationship between Philosophy and Theology," *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975) **XIII**: 61-79.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Rahner, "Theology as Engaged in an Interdisciplinary Dialogue with the Sciences," *Theological Investigations* **XIII**: 80-93; "On the Relationship between Theology and Contemporary Sciences," *Theological Investigations* **XIII**: 94-102.

<sup>4</sup> Rosino Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), especially pp. 1-19: "The Origin and Method of Liberation Theology," and pp. 80-87: "We Cannot Do Theology in a Dead Corner of History: A Conversation with Gustavo Gutierrez."

<sup>5</sup> The literature on feminist theology is vast and growing, as any scholar in the field will attest. Just to mention a few names in connection with its methodologies: Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's path-breaking research into Christian sources, Elizabeth Johnson's contributions to our whole language about God, Rosemary Radford Ruether's linking of feminism with other

liberation movements, the work of Sandra Schneiders clarifying the strands of feminism within and outside the church, Anne Carr's work on feminist spirituality—the roster is large and impressive.

<sup>6</sup> Apart from the titles directly dealing with Dalit theology, works in such related areas as subaltern studies or people's movements bring fresh perspectives on social and religious issues which are quite different from, and offer a direct challenge to, the vision proposed by privileged groups.

<sup>7</sup> It is enough to think of the topics discussed in the annual gathering of the Indian Theological Association. Its publications, as well as the more numerous writings of its many members, are ample proof of the ferment within Indian theologizing, as well of the range and depth of the writings. India presents, right now, one of the most active scenes within Christian theology.

<sup>8</sup> In his lectures at Boston College, Gutierrez used to insist on this. His position is a very convincing answer to those who think—or fear—that liberation theology plays down spirituality or prayer life. Again, when interviewed at the silver jubilee of the publication of his seminal work, *Theology of Liberation*, he made his position strikingly clear. To the question: "Do you preach liberation theology?" his answer was: "I was not ordained to preach liberation theology. I was ordained to preach Jesus Christ."

<sup>9</sup> I am using the term "philosophy" in the normally accepted Western sense, in which it is generally used in Church circles. We tend to study under philosophy themes and questions that can be explored without reference to any revelation or religious authority. Thus Socrates and Marx and Heidegger can be studied in the philosophy department of a seminary, or the philosophical (that is, non-theological) views of theologians like Augustine or Thomas Aquinas.

This is not the meaning given to the term "philosophy" in Indian universities, for instance. On the same floor where I work at Madras University, there are the departments of Philosophy, Jainology, Saiva Siddhanta and Vaishnavism, in addition to ours, namely, Christian Studies. In a Western university, all such departments would be considered parts of religious studies, or of divinity/theology. What is taught under "philosophy" in most Indian universities is Hindu theology (advaita, more than anything else). Sankara or Madhava would be, for a Westerner, theologians, not philosophers, since they are largely interpreting the sacred texts of their religious group.

<sup>10</sup> Bertrand Russell, "The Ten Commandments," *The Independent* (June 1965) 4, as quoted in John R. Burr and Milton Goldinger, *Philosophy and*

*Contemporary Issues* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000) 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> We need not travel far to have first hand knowledge of the influence of mystics and saints, or of persons who are seen thus by their followers. Think of the recent celebration of the fiftieth birthday of Mata Amritanandmayi in Kochi. Politicians, captains of industry, the famous and the obscure—all came in impressive numbers to pay their respect to this woman, whose impact is not based on formal education or money or caste hierarchy or political clout. No scholar or writer in our country has that kind of appeal.

<sup>12</sup> There have been many other studies of religious experience since James's pioneering work. Think of James Pratt, who studied normal religious experience, or Alister Hardy, whose center in Oxford has published several volumes on the religious experiences of ordinary people, or the study of children's spiritual experiences by Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles. For a recent look at some such studies, see: Joe Mannath, "Spirituality and Children," *Vaiharai* 6/1 (2001) 16-25.

<sup>13</sup> That is why there are, and have to be, many theologies, not just one theology. See, for instance, works like: Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., the discussion on the various ways in which spirituality and religiosity are expressed: art, architecture, books, diaries, music, states of life... For a short discussion, see: *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by Edward Yarnold and others (London: SPCK), especially the chapter: "Media of Spirituality."

<sup>15</sup> David Wulff, *Psychology of Religion* (New York: J. Wiley, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> A striking contemporary example would be Thomas Merton, twentieth century's most famous monk. At the beginning of his monastic life (as seen in his bestselling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*) he feels he has come home. He enjoys inner certainty. Later, facing the questions thrown at him by life—racism in the US, the Vietnam War, the truths of the Eastern religions—he found himself a learner once again. His new questions, and the challenge his new awareness represented to one type of settled Catholicism, disappointed and even scandalized a number of his former admirers, who were looking up to him for the certainty of easy answers.

<sup>17</sup> By quoting well-known and respected names, I do not imply, by any means, that ordinary mortals are not mystics. In fact, there is abundant research evidence that many "normal" men, women and children have religious experiences. So, too, as Andrew Greeley's study of the US population has shown, these ordinary mystics are not misfits; they are

happier and function better than the rest of the population.

Closer home, Joshua Iyadurai, an M.Phil. student in our department at Madras University, has just completed a dissertation under my guidance on the religious experiences of Christian college students in Chennai. Contrary to what a number of us may think, it is among the brighter students—students of medical and engineering colleges—that we came across a larger number of religious experiences. We are not talking of the middle ages, but of 2003!