

A MODEST REFLECTION ON “THEOLOGY TODAY: PERSPECTIVES, PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA”

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*This article focuses on the 2011 document of the International Theological Commission (ITC) entitled *Theology Today: Perspective, Principles and Criteria*. The author provides a critical assessment of the document. He also recommends specific ways in which the over-all positive orientation of the document can be fully maximized in view of the important role of a [Catholic] theologian in the mission of the Church.*

“As theology is a service rendered to the Church and to society, so the present text, written by theologians, seeks to be of service to our theologian colleagues and also to those with whom Catholic theologians engage in dialogue. Written with respect for all who pursue theological enquiry, and with a profound sense of the joy and privilege of a theological vocation, it strives to indicate perspectives and principles which characterize Catholic theology and to offer criteria by which that theology may be identified.” (No. 100).

INTRODUCTION

The above quoted text forms part of the conclusion of the document under consideration in this article.¹ The text however, may also serve as a preface or prelude to the whole text indicating what the readers are about to discover in the whole document. Written by theologians for their theologian colleagues

¹ The document “Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria” is an outgrowth of the *International Theological Commission’s* (ITC) continuing effort to deepen its understanding of theology, specifically, Catholic theology. It sets out certain parameters to assess what might be considered an “authentic” Catholic theology and stipulates the manner by which it can contribute to the mission of the Church. The document was completed in 2011 and eventually published in 2012.

and their interlocutors in the theological enterprise, the document delineates what the theological vocation consists of and how catholic theology should be appraised. It clarifies the goals and objectives of the theological enterprise and sets certain expectations for catholic theologians. In this short article, I will attempt to do two things: (a) to critically understand the document and; (b) to raise issues that highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the document. My ultimate hope is to allow the document to be a starting point for further reflection into the ever rich and ever dynamic vocation of the theologian. Karl Barth once wrote that a theologian has no right to put a stop to the theological enterprise. The theological duty, he contends is to keep experiencing and understanding deeply God's loving-kindness in newer and fresher ways.² Such, in my opinion, consists the theological vocation: to be open always to the Spirit in discerning God's manifestations in our lives and never putting a stop to it.

MY INTERPRETATIVE SUMMARY OF THE DOCUMENT

The document is made up of three interrelated chapters which in my summary will be conveniently labelled as the *What of Theology* (Chapter I: Listening to the Word of God), the *How of Theology* (Chapter II: Abiding in the Communion of the Church) and the *Why of Theology* (Chapter III: Giving an Account of the Truth of God). After a short description on the introduction of the document, what follows is a short exposition of each chapter.

THE INTRODUCTION (NOS. 1-3)

The document opens with a recognition of what it refers to as "fundamental development in theology" (no. 1) since Vatican II. Some of these developments in theology are the following: a

² Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960). "This much is certain, that we have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ. Our theological duty is to see and understand it as being still greater than we had seen before."

recognition of the voices of laymen and women; an acknowledgement of variety of cultural contexts (Latin America, Asia, Africa); an awareness of new themes of reflection (peace, justice, ecology, liberation, bioethics); an appreciation of the renewal in biblical, liturgical, patristic, medieval studies; and a positive reception on the new venues for theological reflection (ecumenical, inter/intra religious dialogue). Seen as extremely beneficial for Catholic theology for rapport and solidarity building with the world, they have also occasioned a loss of personality for theology. Thus, the document speaks of “certain fragmentation of theology” (no. 1) that needs to be remedied and addressed if theology has “to communicate the one message of Christ to the world, both theologically and pastorally” (no. 2). A process of self-examination and self-clarification is needed to firm up theology’s identity *vis-a-vis* contemporary events in the world. It is then, in this context that the document proffers a common discourse (no. 2) on Catholic theology to give it a clear identity and self-understanding.

THE WHAT OF THEOLOGY- (NOS. 4-19)

The document establishes the fact that Catholic theology gains existence from a “faithful listening to the Word of God”. It states that “[t]heology, in all its diverse traditions, disciplines and methods, is founded on the fundamental act of listening in faith to the revealed Word of God, Christ himself.” (no. 4) This is the definitive principle by which Catholic theology derives its *raison d'être* (no. 4). Theology then is viewed as a systematic reflection on the Divine Revelation as contained in Scripture and as it is revealed and received by the Church in faith through Tradition. Hence, the Word of God occupies a central place in the theological vocation.

Due to the rich mystery of the Divine Revelation, the process of unveiling it, necessitates the use of diverse theological methods and plurality of theologies (no. 5).³ While theological

³ International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012) no. 2: “The sheer fullness and richness of that revelation is too great to be grasped by any one theology, and in fact gives

methods vary, they have the ultimate goal of illuminating the Truth of the Incarnate Word. The single focus on God's Word is their point of convergence and unity. Hence, the document speaks of "the unity of theology" not in terms of uniformity but in terms of focus (no. 5).⁴ In the same vein, the presence of "plurality of theologies" is a sign of the vibrant ways of exploring "the myriad ways of God's one saving truth," (no. 5) rather than a sign of discord in theology. Consequently though, the various theological methods facilitate the faithful transmission of the Word of God as crystallized in Scripture and Tradition and handed down in the Church (no. 7).⁵

For the document, the most appropriate response to listening to God's Word is faith. Faith is considered both a personal act of "full submission' of the intellect and will" to God (no. 11) and ecclesial, for it builds church's communion.⁶ Theology facilitates in this double movement of faith (personal and ecclesial) as it expounds on the nature of faith (*fides qua*) and the deposit of faith (*fides quae*) (no. 13). Such systematic exposition (rational and scientific) on the content of faith leads to further understanding

rise to multiple theologies as it is received in diverse ways by human beings."

⁴ Ibid., no. 2: "The unity of theology, therefore does not require uniformity, but rather a single focus on God's Word and an explication of its innumerable riches by theologies able to dialogue and communicate with one another."

⁵ Ibid., no.7: "Tradition is the faithful transmission of the Word of God, witnessed in the canon of Scripture by the prophets and the apostles and in the *leiturgia* (liturgy), *martyria* (testimony) and *diakonia* (service) of the Church."

⁶ Ibid., no 13: "Faith is at the same time a reality profoundly personal and ecclesial. In professing their faith, Christians say both 'I believe' and 'We believe'. Faith is professed within the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2Cor 13:13), which unites all believers with God and among themselves (cf. 1Jn 1:1-3), and achieves its ultimate expression in the Eucharist (cf. 1Cor 10:16-17)."

and maturity in faith (*intellectus fidei*)⁷ which eventually results to the edification of the church.

From this discussion, Chapter I of the document gives three criteria of Catholic theology that capture the main themes of the chapter. The following are the criteria based on the document:

1. A criterion of Catholic theology is recognition of the primacy of the Word of God. God speaks ‘in many and various ways’ - in creation, through prophets and sages, through the holy Scriptures, and definitively through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (cf. Heb 1:1-2), (no. 9);
2. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it takes the faith of the Church as its source, context and norm. Theology holds the *fides qua* and the *fides quae* together. It expounds the teaching of the apostles, the good news about Jesus Christ ‘in accordance with the Scriptures’ (1Cor 15: 3, 4), as the rule and stimulus of the Church’s faith (no. 15);
3. A criterion of Catholic theology is that, precisely as the science of faith, ‘faith “seeking understanding [*fides quaerens intellectum*]”...it has a rational dimension. Theology strives to understand what the Church believes, why it believes, and what can be known *sub specie Dei*. As *scientia Dei*, theology aims to understand in a rational and systematic manner the saving truth of God (no. 19).

⁷ Ibid., no. 17: “This is the way of the understanding of faith (*intellectus fidei*). As St Augustine explains, it unfolds from the very dynamism of faith: ‘One who now understands by a true reason what he previously just believed is surely to be preferred to one who still desires to understand what he believes; but if one does not desire and if one thinks that only those things are to be believed which can be understood, then one ignores the very purpose of faith’”.

THE HOW OF THEOLOGY (NOS. 20-58)

Based on the document, the theologian's social location is found in the church (no. 20).⁸ It is also for the Church that s/he exercises his/her theological vocation. The document refers to this as the "ecclesiality of theology" (no. 20). Specifically, the theologian is called to foster communion among the members of the church. The document reminds theologians to be cognizant of this task.

As already indicated earlier, the theologian's ecclesial vocation is founded on the Word of God as revealed in Scriptures. The Scripture animates and informs theology being its soul (no.21). The theologian, thus, is called first of all to be a living witness to the Truth as found in Scripture and Tradition.⁹ The primary task of all theological disciplines as the document conceives it, is the study/interpretation of Scripture before any other things. The document states that "... Catholic theology seeks to attend to the Word of God and thereby to the witness of Scripture in all its work."¹⁰ The task for a Catholic theologian is to provide scriptural basis for Tradition and to make the Word of God become more accessible and comprehensible to all the faithful. To do this, the theologian must be well-versed with the different tools and methods of exegesis (historic-critical method and theological methods) so that s/he can expound systematically on Scriptures (no. 22).

The document identifies several reference points for theology such as the Apostolic Tradition, the ecclesial magisterium and the dogmas of the church to help the theologian in his/her theological work (no. 29). A special attention is also given to the sense of faith and sense of the faithful as well as to reading the signs of the times as additional reference points for theology. I will briefly elucidate on them.

⁸ Ibid., no. 20: "The proper place for theology is within the Church, which is gathered together by the Word of God."

⁹ Ibid., no. 21: "Theology in its entirety should conform to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures should sustain and accompany all theological work."

¹⁰ Ibid., no. 23.

Accordingly, the theologian must develop not only a familiarity with the Apostolic Tradition but fidelity to it is expected. The Apostolic Tradition is a significant locus for Catholic theology (no. 23). Seen as living, diverse and vibrant, the Apostolic Tradition, which includes the teachings of the Fathers¹¹ and dogmas¹², contains essential elements for the growth of the Church.¹³ While diverse, the various manifestations of the one Apostolic Tradition converge in the one Truth of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit continuous to make it a living Tradition as it is passed on from one generation to the other (no. 26). This one Tradition, “normative and universally binding”, (no. 31) is the basis to which all other traditions are judged in terms of their faithfulness to the sacred deposit of faith. Thus, it is critique-proof unlike the specific traditions which are not. The latter (traditions) need to open themselves to criticism in order for them to approximate closer the Church’s faith as contained in the Apostolic Tradition.¹⁴ Hence, fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition is seen as a sure way to orthodoxy (no. 27).

The document stresses the need for Catholic theologians to have a “responsible adherence to the teaching magisterium of the church” (no. 37). A proper understanding of this relationship

¹¹ Ibid., no. 51: “Because the Fathers of the Church, both East and West, have a unique place in the ‘faithful transmission and elucidation’ of revealed truth,...their writings are a specific reference point (*locus*) for Catholic theology.”

¹² Ibid., no. 29: “Nevertheless, dogmas are sure points of reference for the Church’s faith and are used as such in theological reflection and argumentation.”

¹³ Ibid., no. 27: “Tradition is therefore something living and vital, an ongoing process in which the unity of faith finds expression in the variety of languages and the diversity of cultures. It ceases to be Tradition if it fossilises.”

¹⁴ Ibid., no 31: “While criticism is not appropriate with reference to Apostolic Tradition itself, *traditions* must always be open to critique, so that the ‘continual reformation’ of which the Church has need...can take place, and so that the Church can renew herself permanently on her one foundation, namely Jesus Christ.”

is necessary for the theological task.¹⁵ The documents clearly state that a Catholic theologian "recognizes the teaching authority of ecumenical councils, the ordinary and universal magisterium of the bishops, and the papal magisterium." (no. 29) For they are the designated and legitimate interpreters of Tradition (nos. 38; 40; see criteria no. 44 also). In the spirit of communion, the ecclesiastical magisterium and theologians should respect their respective areas of competence as they respectfully collaborate in the service of the one mission (no. 38).¹⁶ Each can learn from one another. From theologians, the magisterium can learn "theological competence and the capacity for critical evaluation" (no. 39). The teaching magisterium can be a rich resource for theologians as they study the sacred deposit of faith. "[M]agisterial interventions can stimulate theological reflection" (no.39) according to the document.

A constructive evaluation of magisterial teachings is part of a theologian's task. Dissent however is not.¹⁷ The document then, urges theologians to be aware of the different degrees and levels of magisterial teachings so that theologians would know the appropriate ways of dealing with them. Moreover, that they should be sensitive to "the special status of dogmas, that is, statements 'in which the Church proposes a revealed truth definitively, and in a way that is binding for the universal Church, so much so that denial is rejected as heresy and falls under an anathema'."¹⁸ Rather than an adversarial attitude, the theologian always attempts to be supportive of magisterial teachings and provide ways in which these teachings can be positively received by the faithful. Furthermore,

¹⁵ Ibid., no 37: "A correct theological methodology therefore requires a proper understanding of the nature and authority of the magisterium at its various levels, and of the relations that properly exist between the ecclesiastical magisterium and theology."

¹⁶ Ibid., no. 37: "Bishops and theologians have distinct callings, and must respect one another's particular competence, lest the magisterium reduce theology to a mere repetitive science or theologians presume to substitute the teaching office of the Church's pastors."

¹⁷ Ibid., no 41: "While 'dissent' towards the magisterium has no place in Catholic theology, investigation and questioning is justified and even necessary if theology is to fulfil its task..."

¹⁸ Ibid., no. 29.

the document holds that rather than mere appendices to his or her theological work, magisterial teachings should play a prominent place in his/her theological reflections. The document recognizes the fact that at times tension may ensue between a particular bishop and a theologian but this is seen more by the document as an opportunity for dialogue rather than opposition between them (no. 42). While the document recognizes the teaching role of the theologian, this does not in any way supersede or replace the role of the ecclesiastical magisterium. The document asserts that “[t]here is indeed in the Church a certain ‘magisterium’ of theologians...but there is no place for parallel, opposing or alternative magisteria,... or for views that would separate theology from the Church’s magisterium.”¹⁹ At times when a bishop finds a theologian’s theological interpretation “erroneous and harmful” to the faith, he has the right to censure it, according to the document.²⁰

The document identifies two interrelated elements that constitute a rich source of reflection and discernment for the theologian. These are the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium*²¹ of the people of God.²² Respectively, they are potent indicators of what is alive in terms of the faith experiences of the faithful. The document challenges theologians to explore, critically evaluate and purify

¹⁹ Ibid., no. 39.

²⁰ Ibid., no. 38: “The bishops who watch over the faithful, teaching and caring for them, certainly have the right and the duty to speak, to intervene and if necessary to censure theological work that they deem to be erroneous or harmful.”

²¹ Ibid., no. 34: “The *sensus fidelium* does not simply mean the majority opinion in a given time or culture, nor is it only a secondary affirmation of what is first taught by the *magisterium*. The *sensus fidelium* is the *sensus fidei* of the people of God as a whole who are obedient to the Word of God and are led in the ways of faith by their pastors. So the *sensus fidelium* is the sense of the faith that is deeply rooted in the people of God who receive, understand and live the Word of God in the Church.”

²² Ibid., no. 35: “For theologians, the *sensus fidelium* is of great importance. It is not only an object of attention and respect, it is also a base and a *locus* for their work. On the one hand, theologians depend on the *sensus fidelium*, because the faith that they explore and explain lives in the people of God.”

them so that they would be correct manifestations of Tradition.²³ For this task to be genuine, the theologian must immerse himself or herself in the context of the church rather than be a detached academic studying them as objects of his/her study.²⁴

The document views the theological vocation as a "communal and collegial ministry" (no. 45). Theology is nourished from within the church and in solidarity with colleagues from across various theological contexts (no. 45). "Theologians need and deserve the prayerful support of the ecclesial community as a whole, and particularly of one another, in their sincere endeavors on behalf of the Church," contends the document (no. 47). Theological works can be deepened and enriched apparently through "interdisciplinary exchange and encounters and ecumenical dialogue" and "mutual critique and evaluation of their work for improvement" (no. 48). But in all of these collaborative exchanges, caution is necessary so that "careful adherence to the fundamental criteria of Catholic theology" is observed (nos. 45; 48; 49). Bishops have the role of regulating these theological exchanges if they are deemed contrary to magisterial teachings (no. 48). The document reminds theologians to open their theological works not only to their peers but also to the whole church for critique and evaluation, knowing fully that their theological assertions are provisional in the light of the teaching of the church.²⁵

²³ Ibid., no. 35: "Theologians help to clarify and articulate the content of the *sensus fidelium*, recognising and demonstrating that issues relating to the truth of faith can be complex, and that investigation of them must be precise...It falls to them also on occasion critically to examine expressions of popular piety, new currents of thought and movements within the Church, in the name of fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition. Theologians' critical assessments must always be constructive; they must be given with humility, respect and charity: 'Knowledge (*gnosis*) puffs up, but love (*agape*) builds up' (1Cor 8:1)".

²⁴ Ibid., no. 35: "On the one hand, theologians depend on the *sensus fidelium*, because the faith that they explore and explain lives in the people of God. It is clear, therefore, that theologians themselves must participate in the life of the Church to be truly aware of it."

²⁵ Ibid., no. 45: "Theologians need and deserve the prayerful support of the ecclesial community as a whole, and particularly of one another, in

The ambassadorial task of a theologian or the promotion of links of solidarity, as the document calls it, does not pertain only to intra and extra-ecclesial collaboration. It also involves being attuned to socio-political developments that may have repercussions for the life of the church.²⁶ The document, therefore mandates theologians to aid the Church in reading the signs of the times (no. 56). In new circumstances and issues the theologian's task includes an "initial articulation of them in the light of faith. Ordained or religious theologians can learn more on this from their lay theologian counter-part."²⁷ The document states that "...theology can help the faithful and the magisterium to see the importance of developments, events and trends in human history, and to discern and interpret ways in which through them the Spirit may be speaking to the Church and to the world," (no. 53). This is a part of its "competence and responsibility" (no. 53). Reading the signs of the times also entails an engagement in interreligious dialogue. The document sees the theologian helping in discerning "the seeds of the Gospel in other cultures and religious traditions" (no. 57).

their sincere endeavours on behalf of the Church, but careful adherence to the fundamental criteria of Catholic theology is especially important in such circumstances. Theologians should always recognise the intrinsic provisionality of their endeavours, and offer their work to the Church as a whole for scrutiny and evaluation."

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 56: "The painstaking work to establish profitable links with other disciplines, sciences and cultures so as to enhance that light and broaden those avenues is the particular task of theologians, and the discernment of the signs of the times presents great opportunities for theological endeavour, notwithstanding the complex hermeneutical issues that arise."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 47: "In the nature of their task, theologians often work at the frontiers of the Church's experience and reflection. Especially with the expanded number nowadays of lay theologians who have experience of particular areas of interaction between the Church and the world, between the Gospel and life, with which ordained theologians and theologians in religious life may not be so familiar, it is increasingly the case that theologians give an initial articulation of 'faith seeking understanding' in new circumstances or in the face of new issues."

Just like in the previous chapter, chapter II develops six criteria for catholic theology that sum up the main ideas elucidated. They are the following according to the document:

1. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should draw constantly upon the canonical witness of Scripture and should promote the anchoring of all of the Church’s doctrine and practice in that witness, since ‘all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture’... Theology should endeavor to open wide the Scriptures to the Christian faithful,... so that the faithful may come into contact with the living Word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12)” (no. 24);
2. Fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition is a criterion of Catholic theology. This fidelity requires an active and discerning reception of the various witnesses and expressions of the ongoing Apostolic Tradition. It implies study of sacred Scripture, the liturgy, and the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and attention to the teaching of the magisterium. (no. 32);
3. Attention to the *sensus fidelium* is a criterion for Catholic theology. Theology should strive to discover and articulate accurately what the Catholic faithful actually believe. It must speak the truth in love, so that the faithful may mature in faith, and not be ‘tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine’ (Eph. 4:14-15), (no. 36);
4. Giving responsible adherence to the magisterium in its various gradations is a criterion of Catholic theology. Catholic theologians should recognize the competence of bishops, and especially of the college of bishops headed by the pope, to give an authentic interpretation of the Word of God handed on in Scripture and Tradition... (no. 44);
5. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should be practiced in professional, prayerful and charitable collaboration with the whole company of Catholic theologians in the communion of the Church, in a spirit of mutual appreciation and support, attentive both to the needs and comments of the faithful and to the guidance of the Church’s pastors (no. 50);

6. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should be in constant dialogue with the world. It should help the Church to read the signs of the times illuminated by the light that comes from divine revelation, and to profit from doing so in its life and mission (no. 58).

THE WHY OF THEOLOGY (NOS. 59-99)

The documents defines theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* (no. 59). By this, it means that theology “seeks to express God’s truth in the rational and scientific mode that is proper to human understanding” (no. 59). As a “rational human endeavor” (no. 60) it has its proper place in the academic field. Considered a science in the Aristotelian sense (no. 67), theology uses “rigorous procedures of analysis and investigation” and it “organizes its study in a coherent way” (no. 62). The document considers philosophy an indispensable ally in the systematization process and self-clarification of theological discourses (nos. 65-66). The document expects too that theologians strike a delicate balance between reason (philosophy) and faith (theology) to avoid “superstition and fanaticism” on the one hand, and a reductionist view of reality on the other hand (no. 64). While, philosophy aids theology to “critique the validity of its assertions” and “clarify its ideas,” (no. 72), theology, however, provides philosophy with a larger and unified vision of life that does not stop with what is immediately perceivable and observable. From this perspective then, “theology is a work of reason illuminated by faith (*ratio fide illustrata*), which seeks to translate into scientific discourse the Word of God expressed in revelation” (no. 60).

The self-clarification process of theology, argues the document, does not rely only on the mediation of philosophy but with the other sciences as well. The document describes this relationship as a “critical assimilation and integration” (no. 82). In other words, “the theologian should indeed take up and utilize the data supplied by other disciplines, but in light of theology’s own proper principles and methods” (no. 81). However, theology has a contribution to make to the other sciences, “[t]hrough a constructive critique, it helps other sciences to liberate themselves from anti-theological elements acquired under the influence of

rationalism. By expelling theology from the household of science, rationalism and positivism reduced the scope and power of the sciences themselves. Catholic theology criticizes every form of self-absolutisation of the sciences, as a self-reduction and impoverishment” (no. 82).

Theology while a scientific discourse about God is also an experience and a personal encounter with God (nos. 86; 95). Theology reminds us of the “sapiential vocation of human intelligence” (no. 86). It provides a broader vision of life that goes beyond the purely material as it also looks into the deeper reasons of things and its attendant moral and spiritual dimensions (no. 90). Hence, theology is characterized by the document as a search for wisdom.²⁸ Theology is borne out of an experience of God and leads to a witnessing of life in God. Therefore, theology rests on a specific kind of spirituality, declares the document.²⁹

Chapter III offers three criteria for catholic theology as a way to synthesize the discussion in the said chapter: The criteria developed are reproduced here:

1. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should strive to give a scientifically and rationally argued presentation of the truths of the Christian faith. For this, it needs to make use of reason and it must acknowledge the strong relationship between faith and reason, first of all philosophical reason, so as to overcome both fideism and rationalism (no. 73);
2. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it attempts to integrate a plurality of enquiries and methods into the unified project of

²⁸ Ibid., no. 90: “Wisdom is a unifying vision. While science endeavours to give an account of a particular, limited and well defined aspect of reality, highlighting the principles that explain the properties of the object being studied, wisdom strives to give a unified view of the whole of reality. It is, in effect, a knowledge in accordance with the highest, most universal and also most explanatory causes.”

²⁹ Ibid., no. 93: “Thus, theology is characterised by a distinctive spirituality. Integral to the spirituality of the theologian are: a love of truth, a readiness for conversion of heart and mind, a striving for holiness, and a commitment to ecclesial communion and mission.”

- the *intellectus fidei*, and insists on the unity of truth and therefore on the fundamental unity of theology itself. Catholic theology recognizes the proper methods of other sciences and critically utilizes them in its own research. It does not isolate itself from critique and welcomes scientific dialogue. (no. 85);
3. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should seek and delight in the wisdom of God which is foolishness to the world (cf. 1Cor 1:18-25; 1Cor 2:6-16). Catholic theology should root itself in the great wisdom tradition of the Bible, connect itself with the wisdom traditions of eastern and western Christianity, and seek to establish a bridge to all wisdom traditions. As it strives for true wisdom in its study of the Mystery of God, theology acknowledges God's utter priority; it seeks not to possess but to be possessed by God. It must therefore be attentive to what the Spirit is saying to the churches by means of 'the knowledge of the saints'. Theology implies a striving for holiness and an ever-deeper awareness of the transcendence of the Mystery of God (no. 99).

CONCLUSION (NO. 100)

The document ends on a more "spiritual note" emphasizing the fact that, in the final analysis, the task of theology as a scientific and rational discourse on God is to help the church gain knowledge of God so that this brings about growth and maturity in the church as well as praise and worship of God.

MY CRITICAL EVALUATION

The second part of this short article looks critically at the different relevant themes and issues in the document. Using the *Doing Theology Spiral*, or what is also known as the *See-Discern-Act framework*,³⁰ I will indicate the strengths, as well as, the weaknesses

³⁰ See Peter Phan, "Methods in Liberation Theologies" *Theological Studies* 6 (2000), 42-60. See also Jose De Mesa and Lode Wostyn, *Doing Theology: Basic Realities and Processes* (Quezon City: Claretian, 1990); Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot, Rodrigo Mejia, eds., *The Pastoral Circle Revisited*. A

of the document and suggest ways in which the inherent strengths of the document can fully come to fruition.

As the phrase indicates, the "doing theology spiral" is a framework of doing theology that sees the theological enterprise as a continuing process of critical reflection on the theologian's active engagement in the theological task in the light of Scripture and Tradition.³¹ The theological endeavor becomes not merely an academic or apologetic enterprise but a participation in the discovery and shaping of theological truths borne out of its actual encounter with concrete historical events in church and society. As indicated, the method involves three theological movements or mediations namely the seeing part, the discernment part, and the action-commitment part.³² I will now use these three movements in doing theology to evaluate the ITC document.

ACT I: THE THEOLOGIAN'S EYE- SEE

The seeing part involves observing, listening and critically analyzing experiences, events and issues in society and in the church that impinge on the life-experiences of the people of God in which the theologian serves. For an accurate assessment and information about the events and happenings that confront the people of God, the theologian relies not only on philosophy but also on the other fields of study like the social sciences. This involves then an appreciation of interdisciplinarity and interculturality.³³

Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005).

³¹ See Gustavo, Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans., Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973). Originally published as *Teología de la Liberación, Perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971).

³² For a succinct discussion on the method of liberation theology, see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans., Robert Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987).

³³ Raúl Fonet-Betancourt sees the intercultural dialogue as a process in which we open our cultures to other cultures with the hope that in the process our culture is changed and reformed for the better in the encounter. He defines intercultural dialogue in the following way:

READING THE SIGN OF THE TIMES

The ITC document primarily views theology as rational knowledge and wisdom study with philosophy (one suspects Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophies) as the lead dialogue partner. This view (speculative theology and sometimes apologetic) is balanced off with its experiential take on theology by putting a premium on the importance of “reading the signs of the times” and by looking into the concrete life experiences of the people of God, as well as, its inter-disciplinary move to learn from the other academic disciplines not limited to philosophy. In short, the impression that one gets from the document is that, theology is not just a speculative exercise on the received faith but also a reflection on how (experience) we have been a church in the world.

CHURCH A LOCUS THEOLOGICUS

The document also makes it very clear that the theologian exists in a historical location and not in a vacuum. S/he, according to the document, is in the world and in the church and this historical “situatedness” determines the “source, context and norm” of his/her theologizing (no. 15; 54). Here then, the life of the church becomes a *locus theologicus*. This is another positive aspect of the document.

“intercultural dialogue has its strict meaning in the intention of opening cultures, rupturing their possible categorical, symbolic, moral, and other closures, and thereby fomenting the exercise of critical reflexivity in the members of any particular culture. Intercultural dialogue is understood, therefore, as a method for learning to *relativize* the traditions consolidated as “one’s own” in any culture and, perhaps above all, for intensifying the tensions or conflicts between those subjects or forces within a culture interested in preserving and/or defending and those interested in transforming. Through this complex process of opening, *relativization*, and becoming conscious of the possibility of change, intercultural dialogue prepares cultures to know more about each other, and through this knowledge of others each one comes to know itself better.” Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Philosophical Presupposition of Intercultural Dialogue*, accessed May 21, 2012, <http://them.polylog.org/1/ffr-en.htm>.

DIALOGUE WITH OTHER DISCIPLINES

In conjunction with the earlier points, the document mandates theologians to learn from other academic disciplines and develop familiarity with their methods (no. 53) so that s/he will have a solid grasp of trends and development in human history and indicate how the Spirit might be speaking through these events.

A HALF-HEARTED INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The above-mentioned elements show an overall positive trend in the document. I perceive though a certain drawback that may dampen the optimistic view of the document in terms of how it identifies its relation with the world. This problem is caused by what I call a "half-hearted view of interdisciplinarity." By this, I mean the document's hesitating attitude to fully accept the consequences of being in the world and relating with the world. Interdisciplinarity pertains not only to the mutual exchange and interaction of disciplines of knowledge, but it also relates to how one views the very encounter itself. Through interdisciplinarity, the communication process for the pooling of resources of seemingly self-contained disciplines is facilitated. The purpose of which is the achievement of a greater understanding of a particular reality, as well as, providing a swift resolution to a specific problem. In this sense, interdisciplinarity "provides a democratic, dynamic and co-operative alternative to the old-fashioned, inward-looking and cliquish nature of disciplines."³⁴ Therefore, the ultimate aim of the interface then is two-fold: one, *epistemological*, that is, the production of new forms of knowledge by the rejuvenation of stale and inflexible knowledge into more vibrant ones as a consequence of the intermingling. The other, *transformational*, that is, these disciplines achieve enrichment or mutual transformation in themselves as a result of the interface. Thus, it is about the failure of the document to really take into serious account the consequences of interdisciplinarity that I take issue of. Let me elaborate.

³⁴ Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

ONLY FOR INFORMATION SAKE?

When speaking of the “signs of the times”, the document mandates theologians to be cognizant of societal issues (socio-cultural and religious currents) that affect their doing of theology and urges them to interpret and articulate them in the light of faith (see criteria 28, no. 53). This is a laudable move on the part of the document. I, however, cannot avoid thinking that this call for the “examination” of events and developments in history may be read as mere “information-seeking” for the theologian rather than real engagement with the world that will affect theological reflection and praxis. After reading about a crucial event in the newspaper, the theologian might think that the event is too secular and has nothing to do with theological discourse. Thus, s/he might simply go back to theological speculation on the data of revelation which is the very theological material for him/her. In short, there is no direct connection between knowing an event and doing something about it. Likewise, knowledge without real and concrete engagement with it makes the theologian an armchair theologian speculating in his/her ivory tower of ideas.

REAL AUTONOMY FOR OTHER DISCIPLINES?

Furthermore, the document rightly confers autonomy to the other sciences in bringing truth about reality, however, they are only useful in terms of the purposes and intents of theology.” As the document puts it, “... other disciplines must not be allowed to impose their own ‘magisterium’ on theology. The theologian should indeed take up and utilize the data supplied by other disciplines, but in light of theology’s own proper principles and methods,” (no. 81). One wonders if there is a genuine interface between and among disciplines when it is primarily utilitarian in intent. In addition, real cross-fertilization and mutual enrichment between theology and the other scientific fields may be in jeopardy when too much emphasis is given to theology as “*crede ut intelligas*” and “*intellectus fidei*”. When this happens, a genuine recognition of the integrity and autonomy of other disciplines to express the truth about God may be taken for granted. In this case, the relationship

is simply a "semantic mix" where theology gains the upper hand.³⁵ The issue is really for the document to articulate various ways in which these disciplines contribute to theological self-understanding. Differently stated: "[u]nderlying all these engagements is the belief that if theology is 'faith seeking understanding', such 'understanding' cannot be a monopoly of the revealed word; it can *also* be discerned in the frameworks of contemporary sciences. Or, better still, the Word itself can *only* be revealed in the power and fragility of human reason."³⁶

ACT 2: THE THEOLOGIAN'S MIND, HEART AND SOUL - DISCERN

This part of doing theology seeks to interpret the life experiences and situation of the people of God in the light of Scripture and the living tradition. Scripture and tradition become vital sources of and guide for theologizing. A critical correlation happens then between the present-day-experiences of Christians and the Judeo-Christian Tradition out of which an appropriate commitment or action ensues. The task of the theologian is to look at the problem at hand and gain wisdom and illumination from dependable and normative theological sources.

SCRIPTURE THE SOUL OF THEOLOGY

Drawing inspiration from *Dei Verbum*, the document reiterates the idea that Scripture is considered the soul and foundation of theology. Sacred Scripture becomes the main normative source of theological witness because it contains God's

³⁵ Peter Phan, *Methods of Liberation Theologies*, 44-45. Peter Phan explains what Clodovis Boff means by semantic mix: "Semantic mix is a hybrid discourse in which theology and sociology are simply mixed and not fully integrated, often with theology dominating sociology, as is found in some magisterial documents on social problems and in some political theologies"

³⁶ Agnes Brazil and Daniel Franklin Pilario, "Disciplines, Interdisciplinarity and Theology," *Hapag* vol. 4, no. 1-2 (2007), 13.

word and as such is inspired. Thus, a constant contact with the Word rejuvenates theology. Scripture, being the soul, animates theology, its body.

A MUTUAL ILLUMINATION BETWEEN SCRIPTURE AND LIFE

I am all for the document's move in making Scripture a foundation and soul of theology. To fully realize the implication of this however, the call of the document must not be interpreted to mean the mere contemplation of Scripture for pietistic purposes or for ensuring fidelity to the Apostolic tradition. More than these (devotion and fidelity to tradition), an active dialogue and mutual engagement between the world-of-Scripture and the theologian's present-world must take place. In this interaction, both poles mutually clarify and challenge each other with the assumption that they represent two divergent experiences (past and present) but converge at certain points (theological themes and issues), thus a dialogue and interweaving happen. The theologian brings to Scriptures his or her present predicaments and Scripture provides a rich reservoir of meanings that allows new understanding to occur. On the one hand, the "task is to let the text speak for itself, and to that end they inevitably have to engage with the horizons of the text via literary context, grammar, history, and so on."³⁷ On the other hand, the present day concern of the theologian may even demonstrate the "limit" of Scripture being "God's word written in human words" to deal with the present issue. Be that as it may, this mutual interaction allows an informed theological decisions and actions to happen. It is in this appropriation process, where Scripture illuminates life and life illuminates Scripture that the call of the document must be read.³⁸

³⁷ C. René Padilla, "The Interpreted Word: Reflections On Contextual Hermeneutics," in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed., Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 301.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

TRADITION AND TRADITIONS AND THEIR HISTORICITY

Aside from Scripture, the document identifies the Apostolic Tradition which includes the teachings of the Fathers and dogma, as another reference point for theology. In general, the document has taken a dynamic and historical view of Tradition in the recognition of its living engagement with history. Expressed in myriad ways, tradition is not monolithic. Following Vatican II, tradition is given a *teleological* bend (for holiness and faith, no. 26) rather than a *juridical* one (something that is externally imposed).³⁹

A critical look, however, on the document reveals certain downside that may prevent the positive elements from full realization. Firstly, the document differentiates Tradition from traditions. Tradition with a capital T comprises the "sacred deposit of the Word of God" (no. 30) and the Apostolic Tradition. They are both impervious to history and its vicissitude. The cultural adaptations and manifestations of the big Tradition are what is called traditions (in small letter t). Tradition then is seen on two senses, the content (Scripture and Apostolic Tradition) and the process of transmitting Tradition in an undiluted way. I fully understand the idea of separating what is essential from the non-essential of faith, both in terms of content and the act of transmission. I also believe that there should be certain constants in doing theology.⁴⁰ What I do not fully comprehend, however, is

³⁹ See Brian Johnstone CSsR, "What is Tradition? From Pre-Modern to Postmodern," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 5 (2005), 1-45, accessed May 22, 2012, http://aejt.com.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0008/395504/AEJT_5.3_Johnstone.pdf.

⁴⁰ In one of his articles, José De Mesa refers to Edward Schillebeeckx's four theological constants: "In his analysis there are four such [New Testament] constants: (1) a basic theological and anthropological principle: God wills the salvation of human beings in and through history and people find their fulfillment through this divine action; (2) a Christological mediation: it is Jesus of Nazareth who reveals definitely who God is and who human beings are before God; (3) the message and lifestyle of the church, the following of Jesus, and the embodiment of his Spirit in today's world; and (4) eschatological fulfillment: God's salvific will, though already operative in our world ("already"), cannot be confined

the way Tradition (capital T) is given a static and permanent nature. The idea that Tradition (capital T) cannot be affected by developments in history looks unrealistic to me. I believe that even what we consider as constants in theology are configured and reconfigured as they undergo “osmosis”⁴¹ with cultural and social factors in society. If, for example, soteriology is a constant in theology, I assume that this idea has taken on not only different cultural embodiments but has gained various meanings through time. As liberation theologians have shown salvation or liberation does not only have strictly spiritual connotation but has political undertones too. Contextual theologians have pointed out also that even Scripture, the *norma normans*, may need to be critiqued so that it becomes liberating and salvific to all.⁴² My argument is that even Scripture itself needs to be assessed in the light of new issues so that it also is enriched for relevancy to people’s lives and gains its full potency for our times.⁴³ Hence, transformation even at the level of

within the boundary of our history and therefore looks toward a future (“not yet”).” José de Mesa, “Theological Constants and Theological Reflections: The Question of Truth in the Pastoral Circle,” in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited. A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, eds., Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot, and Rodrigo Mejía (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005), 96.

⁴¹ Osmosis is defined by the Encarta Dictionary (online) as “the gradual, often unconscious, absorption of knowledge or ideas through continual exposure rather than deliberate learning.”

⁴² For example, Elizabeth Johnson brings to attention the patriarchal bias that is present in Scripture. See her article entitled “Feminist Hermeneutics” *Chicago Studies* 27 (1988), 123-35. Similarly, Reimund Bieringer argues that it is quite possible that “human sinfulness” might have entered, in a way, into the core of the biblical text. See his “The Normativity of the Future: The Authority of the Bible for Theology.” *Bulletin ET: Zeitschrift für Theologie in Europa* 8, no. 1 (1997), 52-67.

⁴³ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology (358-381) and Jose Miguez Bonino, “Hermeneutics, Truth, and Praxis,” (344- 357) in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed., Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986).

the so-called "kernel" (Tradition) happens and not only on the "husk" (traditions). Change is a necessary component of their historicity. What I think we need to safeguard in Tradition is its undeviating attempt to be ever closer to the living ideals of the gospel and its enduring fidelity in bringing this ideals into life in a salvific way.⁴⁴ The state of stasis⁴⁵ in Tradition means death to it. Therefore, it would not be life giving anymore.

CREATIVE FIDELITY

Attention also can be given to the tone in which the concept of fidelity to Apostolic Tradition is discussed. While "active and discerning reception of traditions" (no. 32) is presented as an element of fidelity. This discussion is carefully laced with implicit warning signs on the need for "unanimous consensus of the Fathers" (no. 27), the "infallible nature" of dogmas in faith and morals (no. 28), and the mention of "anathema" when binding dogma is not faithfully carried out (no.29). The document cites *Lumen Gentium* no. 25 to give emphasis to the doctrine of the "Church's infallible Ordinary and Universal Magisterium".⁴⁶ While

⁴⁴ I think that "constants" are not static. They accumulate meanings as they spiral in history. They are constants in the sense that they do not diminish in significance even in the passage of time. Precisely because of their ability to adapt and to continue the active self-clarification process in time.

⁴⁵ The online Encarta Dictionary defines stasis as "a state in which there is neither motion nor development, often resulting from opposing forces from balancing each other."

⁴⁶ This phrase indicates the infallible teaching authority of bishops when in communion with the Pope and with one another on definitive statements that they make. *Lumen Gentium* no. 25 states "Although the bishops, taken individually, do not enjoy the privilege of infallibility, they do, however, proclaim infallibly the doctrine of Christ on the following conditions: namely, when, even though dispersed throughout the world but preserving for all that amongst themselves and with Peter's successor the bond of communion, in their authoritative teaching concerning matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively and absolutely." Austin

the document speaks about a *responsible adherence* to the ecclesiastical Magisterium, this cautious stance betrays a certain understanding of fidelity not as creative fidelity but the idea of a strict adherence (submission of mind and will) to its teaching and authority.⁴⁷

MAGISTERIUM, THEOLOGIAN, SENSUS FIDELIUM

For the document, the ecclesiastical magisterium and theologians are complementary partners in the one mission of the Church.⁴⁸ They should then be supportive of one another and at times be “critical” of each other’s work for improvement. The call of the document is for theologians to develop an attitude of responsible adherence to the ecclesiastical magisterium. However,

Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1987), 370.

⁴⁷ The idea of creative fidelity contains the element of delicately balancing faithfulness to the original intention and meaning of the text and recasting it for the present. The challenge then for the theologian when dealing with dogma is first to come to terms with the authentic meaning of it and then proceed to re-appropriating (creative) it in a way that is more relevant to the present while still maintaining its meaning (fidelity). See Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

⁴⁸ When the model of complementarity is applied to the man and woman relationship, some feminists think that it still portrays a hierarchical relationship. While this model acknowledges the basic equality between a man and a woman, it however delimits this equality to certain functions and responsibilities in the church perhaps because of certain psychic attributes that naturally dispose them to certain functions. In crucial functions, like leadership in the church, this is reserved for men because they are “naturally” equipped to be leaders, while women take on more secondary roles because, by “nature”, they are for more nurturing functions. The feminist task is to bring “full humanity” to both men and women. As humans they equally share the same human qualities and capacities. They should then work hand and hand rather than as subordinates or as complementary. See, for instance, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

when it comes to the teaching ministry of the church, the document clearly identifies who the sole and authoritative interpreter is. In the interpretation of dogma, the Magisterium has the last say, argues the document. It also grants the right to bishops to sanction “erring” theologians. Two things can be asked here in this situation, is real autonomy for theologians to exercise their given vocation, or are they merely subservient to the hierarchy and do not have distinct autonomy at all? What about the practice of Collegiality where significant members of the church actively participate and contribute to the understanding and interpretation of dogma.⁴⁹ The saving factor in the document comes when it brings into the discussion the centrality of *sensus fidelium*. It would have been ideal if these three “magisteria”—the pope-bishops, the theologians and the people of God—be included in the enlarged understanding of the teaching magisterium of the church. It might be noted, that the teaching of the ecclesiastical magisterium and even that of the work of theologians would have not made any significance when detached from the full life of the church. The document then, is right in bringing the *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium* issues on the forefront of discussion.

ACT 3: THE THEOLOGIAN’S HANDS AND FEET- ACTION

The doing theology spiral culminates each reflection process with a concrete action or resolution that flows directly from the two previous movements. This action or decision is supposed to have a direct bearing on the theological issue at hand. This action is a result of an informed decision based on evidences and

⁴⁹ In his earlier works, A. Dulles proposed the idea of “dual magisterium,” describing the dialectical relationship of mutual critique and influence between the Magisterium and the theologian in the proclamation of the Church’s faith. See Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe in: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad: 1984). For a deeper discussion on the said issue, see Anthony J. Figueiredo, *The Magisterium-Theology Relationship: Contemporary Theological Conceptions in the Light of the Universal Teaching since 1835 and the Pronouncement of the Bishops of the U.S.* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2001).

analysis. The aim is to transform the “problematic” situation into a condition that conforms more with the ideals of the Reign of God and its call for justice and solidarity.

THE INTERWEAVING OF ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXIS

The document sees the theological process as an intellectual act (*intellectus fidei; fides quaerens intellectum*) that leads not only to a knowledge of God (*scientia Dei*) but a personal devotion to the person of Jesus Christ (wisdom). Moreover, that this knowledge of God is geared to contemplation of him and anchors the spirituality of the theologian. The goal of theology then, as viewed by the document, boils down to the proclamation of certitudes deduced from Revelation. While certainly a valid approach, this orthodox way of doing theology can still be enriched with the idea that the theological process is also about the “doing of the truth” as opposed to mere “proclamation of doctrine”.⁵⁰ Put differently, it is not simply an intellectual act but an engagement with concrete realities of life. The first act of theology is life, and the second is a faith reflection on faith-life. Hence, if the document takes this into account then its call for the reading the signs of the times gains more significance and seriousness. The call to make church life “the source, norm and context of theology” is put still into sharper focus. As articulated already by Yves Congar years ago:

If the church wishes to deal with real questions of the modern world it must open a new chapter of theological-pastoral epistemology...instead of using only revelation and tradition as starting point...start with the facts and questions derived from the world and from history...

The document has already rightly pointed out to two ways of “getting involved in the world” through ecumenism and

⁵⁰ See Bernard J. Verkamp, “On Doing the Truth: Orthopraxis and the Theologian,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988), 1-23, accessed May 22, 2012, <http://www.ts.mu.edu/content/49/49.1/49.1.1.pdf>.

interreligious dialogue. But in these dialogues the justice component which is prominently absent in the document is also an integral part.

A LIVED SPIRITUALITY- A FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE

Seen in this light, the spirituality proposed by the document becomes an integrated and a "lived one". It will see both the introspective-contemplative aspect, as well as, the act of solidarity as constitutive of the spiritual act. Theology as spirituality communicates the experience of liberating hope and love of God especially to the poor. Theology becomes the medium of this communication. As G. Gutierrez's contends:

A theology, no matter how relevant, is nothing but a medium for deepening those things [hope and love in Jesus]. Theology is a hermeneutic hope that is lived as a gift of God. In effect, that is what it means to proclaim liberating hope to the world in which we live today as Church.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

I have set out to indicate where the document shines out brightly and where its regressive shadow blocks off this light. In general, the light fails to shine brightly because of its protective and cautious stance on issues related to interdisciplinarity, historicity of tradition, views on leadership in the church, to name just a few. It opens its door to changes but, as it were, it still protects this door tightly with its two hands from fully opening up so as not to be overrun by the gush of wind that is slowly permitted to enter. If this were just a strategy for "testing the waters," so to speak, so that it can critically gauge its future engagement with these themes it has discussed, then there is a glimmer of hope to be seen. If, however, it is really, a defensive posture, then the forward looking elements in the document will remain cast in its shadow. The positive

⁵¹ G. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 302.

elements are still there but will take time to reach illuminating potentials. Stated in a very different way, the strength of a document depends not only in going back to normative sources, but also in the orientation you give to the document as one crafts it. In short, it is not only about an agenda of “ressourcement” but also an agenda of “aggiornamento”. Put still in another way, the vocation of a theologian reaches another level of heights when it progresses from seeing the faith “as a belief in a content- in truths to a faith as trust, fidelity and a way of experiencing and seeing.”⁵²

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⁵² This is an insight I got from Lode Wostyn in a short conversation with him. The *Doing Theology Spiral* points to this kind of an experiential engagement that happens in doing theology.