

Theological Reflection: A Pastoral Methodology

I. Introduction

- A. Connecting life experiences with God
- B. For the sake of Evangelization

Evangelization is the process whereby the Good News of the Reign of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is incarnated in the Church, in order that a person's true identity might be transformed in response to God's Reign, and that joined with the others in the community of the Church, he might be the instrument for the transformation of all strata of humanity.

Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelium Nuntiandi* 17-24

- C. Integration of our own experience with what we believe enables us to be believable witnesses to others.

II. Spirituality is the art of hearing and responding to God's action in our lives

- A. Surface events and activities of your personal lives.
- B. Find out what is really going on.
- C. Enter into the mystery of God.
- D. Be open to the transforming impact of the encounter with God.
- E. Act accordingly.

III. The Method of Theological Reflection

- A. What is going on?
 - Physically – verbatim
 - Emotionally – What is your reaction?
 - Intellectually – new insights
 - Relationally – with people, with God
- B. Critical Reflection Questions
 - Why do I act, feel, or think this way?
- C. Call on the Christian Tradition to give insight.
 - Scripture
 - Creed and dogmas
 - Sacraments
 - Christian worldview
 - Code of morality
 - Liturgy and prayers

D. Personal reflection relating present reality with tradition

What is the connection?

What difference does it make?

E. Response

New way of seeing or thinking

New way of being or acting

IV. Unless you become like a child

A. Make the exercise a personal encounter

B. Express who God is and who you are (humility)

C. Be honest and trusting (in weakness is our strength)

D. Be open to change

E. Cooperate with grace

Exercise in Theological Reflection

Write up a verbatim on an incident. A verbatim is a report of the incident, including who said and did what, as closely as you can remember it. The incident should be something that caused discomfort, or a conflict, preferably in a church setting or a situation that raised issues about who God is or about Church teaching. Then evaluate the incident answering the following questions:

1. How did you feel about the interaction?
2. Where was God in that incident?
3. Find a scripture passage (teaching, incident, action) that seems to pertain.
4. Does anything from a great teacher (known to you or a historical person) seem similar, or have anything to offer to your consideration?
5. Look at your reaction/thoughts about God in this incident. Does the God you perceive in it correspond to the God we teach?
6. Imagine the situation with Christ present. Walk through all of it with him there. What does Christ do or say?
7. Close with a consideration of how the incident and your thoughts on it might affect your future ministry or your relationship with God.

Disciples on the Road to Emmaus
Luke 24:13-35

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?"

They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see."

And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer ⁸ these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.

With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.