

THE VOCATION OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS THEOLOGIAN

- Topic: The Vocation in Interreligious Theology:
Paul Knitter's Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue
- Convenor: Francis X. Clooney, Boston College
- Presider: Francis X. Clooney, Boston College
- Presenter: Paul F. Knitter, Xavier University, Cincinnati
- Respondents: Leo Lefebure, Fordham University
Van T. Pham, Xavier University, Cincinnati

Paul Knitter is a foremost post-Vatican II theologian of religions. Since he has recently retired from full-time teaching, it seemed opportune to hear Paul explore how dialogue with Christian theologians and people of other faiths has affected his sense of vocation, his theological focus and method. Paul began by discussing the origins of his interest in other religions: studies in Rome at the time of the Council, graduate work in Munster and Marburg, early teaching at the Catholic Theological Union, the inspiration of John Dunne's *The Way of All the Earth* and Raimon Panikkar's *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, and interreligious friendships. Paul then identified five dimensions of his work, sketched here mainly by quotations from his presentation.

1. *The sources of theology.* "I began teaching armed with David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* and Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. As a theologian I was to be a mediator between culture and my Christian religion, carrying on a mutually clarifying and mutually criticizing conversation between common ('cultural') human experience and the Christian fact. But I came to be touched and claimed also by 'the Buddhist, or Hindu, or Muslim facts.' Though certain that God has spoken to me in Jesus the Christ, I became certain that God was doing likewise in Buddha, the Upanishads, the Qur'an. This was God speaking to me, saving truth for me. . . . Without these other revelations, my own was incomplete; something was missing."

2. *The necessity of practice/spirituality.* "Another discovery—in this case, a sobering reminder—resulted from trying to apply Dunne's method of passing over. Dunne insists that the passing over to another tradition cannot be just a 'head trip.' It's got to include the whole person, especially one's imagination and feelings, as one allows the symbols and images to entice us and lead one to new experiences, new insights, new possibilities. To pass over to another religious world one must, to some extent, practice it in order to see how it looks and how it feels. Otherwise, the process doesn't work. So I had likewise better be feeling and practicing my own Christian beliefs and rituals. To practice dialogue, I have to practice my own faith."

3. *A Common Practice.* "A third insight into what it means and demands to be an interreligious theologian, started to take shape for me in the mid-80s. Through the kinds of dialogue I was getting involved in, I found myself part of

a practice that preceded (rather than replaced) passing over to each other's spirituality. It called persons of differing traditions to act together, and this served as a basis for carrying on a religious conversation with each other. In my Christian terms, I'm talking about the *liberative praxis* (Buddhists might call it *engaged spirituality*) by which we respond to and try to do something about the unnecessary suffering that afflicts so many humans and other sentient beings in the world around us."

4. *The creative tension of interreligious friendships.* "This brings me to a fourth way in which my dialogue has informed my theology—through friendships, through the tension, mostly creative, between being a Christian and being a friend with persons of other traditions. In turn, this has to do with how I feel in the presence of interreligious friends: I have to *watch my language*. There are ways of talking about Christian beliefs or viewpoints that I know would be not only perplexing but even offensive to such friends. For Christian language to be both faithful to the biblical witness and appropriate to our present interreligious context, it has to be language that fosters friendship. Carrying on conversations with religious friends has become for me a means of discovering new ways of understanding my own Christian beliefs and experience."

5. *Relationship with/understanding of Christ.* "Here I come to what is for me, and I guess for all Christians, the heart of our identity: my understanding of and relationship with Jesus the Christ. The challenge and experience of interreligious dialogue over these years has enabled me to respond more adequately both to the question, 'Who do you say I am?' (Mark 8: 29) and to the invitation, 'Come, follow me' (Matt. 4: 19). In the beginning, for the most part in *No Other Name?*, I wanted to come to a clearer, more dialogical, understanding of the place of Jesus in a newly perceived world of pluralism. But my efforts led me to examine my relationship to Jesus as I tried to relate to other religions and carry on friendships with other believers."

Paul highlighted two sentences capturing the truth of his relationship with Christ: "Christ is the way that is open to other ways" (John Cobb) and "Christ is the way that can, and often must, challenge other ways."

Both Leo Lefebure and Van Pham expressed great appreciation for Paul's dedicated theology, yet raised some challenging points. Leo questioned Paul's optimism, by highlighting points of difficulty, those moments of real difference among believers in different traditions, when one finds contrasts in basic beliefs and a lack of reciprocity in true openness to learning. Dialogue is not always easy; and in some contexts, expectations of friendship may be misplaced. Van highlighted the distinctive complexities underlying Christian identity in Asia. Interreligious relationships are simply a part of life, as family, culture, language, and religion bind one closely to people of other faiths. This also changes the particular vantage point of an Asian Catholic in the United States, as she or he considers pluralism here in light of this fresh, "non-European" way of being a Christian and theologian.

As a fitting conclusion, Paul predicted the book he will now be writing:
Without Buddha, I Could Not Be a Christian.

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

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TEACHING AND LEARNING MORAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Teaching and Learning Moral Theology
in a Cross-Cultural Context—The Philippines and the USA
Convener: James T. Bretzke, Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley
Presenter: James T. Bretzke, Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley
Moderator: William C. Spohn, Santa Clara University
Respondent: James Keenan, Weston Jesuit School of Theology

Living out our individual and corporate vocations as moral theologians in the age of globalization and a world Church necessarily will call us to greater interaction, collaboration, and even at times navigating conflicts both in and across a variety of geographical, cultural, economic, and religious contexts. Catholic moral theology, especially in its reliance on a natural law tradition and a strong central authority exercised by the Magisterium, has traditionally accented the universal in Christian ethics over the particular, cultural, and local instantiations of Christian morality. While inculturation has gained notional acceptance, insufficient attention has been given to the conditions and possibilities of approaching the inculturation of moral theology. After studying and teaching abroad for a decade on two continents (Asia and Europe) I was convinced that an ethics course done from a cross-cultural perspective must pay special attention to developing a better dialogue process as part of its fundamental methodology. This cross-cultural dialogue is necessary so that each culture can have its own say, without being prejudiced or forced into a conceptual framework of another culture's ethical tradition, which in turn may obscure and/or distort the insights which the first culture has to offer in deepening our shared understanding of not just the Gospel and its ethical ramifications, but the broader ethical tradition as well.

Our convention session looked at how differing contexts both engage and challenge some of the fundamental presumptions about a "catholic" moral theology, whose universality and cross-cultural applicability are grounded in a natural-law tradition, by looking at some of the concrete challenges this problematic finds in our theological schools in America and the Philippines. Since the summer of 2000, James Keenan and I have been alternating as visiting professors of moral theology at the Loyola School of Theology (LST) in Metro Manila, teaching what the Filipino students refer to as a "crash course" in