

## On pastoral theology

1. Pastoral theology is a discipline within the ecclesiastical studies of the Catholic Church for those who are preparing for consecrated and ordained ministry. Since 1965, after Vatican II, all the this course is also offered to the baptized Catholics who wish to respond to God's call to engage themselves fulltime in the pastoral ministry of the diocese and/or the parish.
2. Since pastoral theology is a theology with a corpus of knowledge in relation to the different ministries in the Church. Thomas G. Oden (1983:11) argues that it involves a method of pastoral reflection which resort to Scripture, traditions, reason and experience, in order to better understand God's revelation in history of the world.
  - 2.1. *Scripture*: it is the self-communication of God to humankind in terms of the canonical books of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments.
  - 2.2. *Traditions*: it is the understanding of the Church in relation to the Scripture, comprising of the teachings of the Church ancestors, papal writings, the various documents of the Councils (e.g. Vatican II), the writings of the Asian Bishops (known as FABC documents, 1971 till 2004) and Bishops of the local Church of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.
  - 2.3. *Reason*: a faculty of the human person created with intelligence to engage in a theological reflection on God's Word and the Church's traditions in relation to what are the events in our lives, both personal and collective, local and global.
  - 2.4. *Experience*: can be personal (a woman and a Christian) and collective (the Chinese in SS 2; the Mandarin-speaking Catholics of Holy Rosary Church). These life-experiences, personal and collective, "are themselves profoundly influenced by both the Christian faith and the surrounding cultures." (James D.& Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, 1995:5) The surrounding cultures refer to the "convictions, values and biases" (Ibid) including the political, economic, social and religious incidences, both local, regional and global, that form the social setting in which we do our pastoral ministry and thus influence our pastoral theology as well.
3. Pastoral theology informs Catholics who are in the pastoral ministry of the parish that we have to learn first and foremost from God who pastor (look after) the people of Israel: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" Jeremiah 3:15; Ezekiel 34:23; "I

- will set shepherds over them [my sheep] who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed” Jeremiah 3:4; Ezekiel 3:11. Finally God offers the Son as the best example of shepherding. Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11): “I know my own and my own knows me... and I lay down my life for my sheep.” “The sheep that belongs to me listen to my voice: I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life (John 10:14, 15, 27-28).
4. From the gospels and Acts of the Apostles, we learn that the evangelists (Mark, Matthew, Luke and John) have already given us some biblical knowledge which is the foundation of pastoral theology.
- 4.1. *A Calling to be God’s Shepherds:* Jesus told Peter: “From now on it is people that you will catch” (Luke 5:10)
- 4.2. *Newness of God’s reign:* “No one tears a piece from a new cloak to put it on an old cloak...No new wine must be put in fresh skins.” (Luke 5:36)
- 4.3. *Human Beings are more important:* “The Sabbath was made for persons and not persons for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) “The Son of man is master of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5) And Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: “is it permitted on the Sabbath do good, or to do evil; to save life or to destroy it?” (Luke 6:11)
- 4.4. *Servant-selfless leadership:* “No, anyone who wants to be the first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of man himself came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)
- 4.5. *Be Selfless:* “God must increase and I must decrease.” (John 3:30)
- 4.6. *God works through us:* “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.” (John 15: 5)
- 4.7. *Justice, mercy and good faith are more important:* “You pay your tithe of mine and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law- justice, mercy and good faith. These you should have practiced, those not neglected.” (Mat. 23:23)
- 4.8. *Faith with actions:* “everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible person who built the house on rock.” (Matthew 7:24) “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brethren of mine, you did it to me.” (Mat. 25:40).
- 4.9. *Love of God and love of neighbour, mercy and justice more important than sacrifices or burnt offering:* “To love God with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to

love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.” (Mark 12:24)

4.10. *Love of enemies*: “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.” “Be children of your Father in heaven for God causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike.” (Matthew 5:44-46)

4.11. *God love ALL people*: “God has no favourites and that anybody of any nationality (cultures, religions, caste, status...etc) who fears “God and does what is right is acceptable to God. (Acts 11: 34-35)

5. Pastoral theology that motivates us to bring about God’s saving justice in the world.

5.1. Biblical basis:

Rejoice at the presence of the Lord,  
For God comes to rule the earth.  
God will rule the world with saving justice  
And the peoples with fairness. (Psalm 98:9)

5.2. “The *social action of Christians must be inspired by the fundamental principle of centrality of the human person*” which calls for “those eminent values that govern every well-ordered and productive human society: truth, justice, love and freedom.” (CSDC, no. 527, p. 300)

5.3. God’s saving justice demands that there is a just and fair distribution of the resources of the earth for ALL. The recent exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI at the 13<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, April 17-May 1, 2007 emphasized “the principle of the universal destination of all the goods of creation” so that “everything that the earth produces and all that human beings transform and manufacture, all their knowledge and technology, is meant to serve the material and spiritual development and fulfillment of the human family and **all** its members.”

5.4. “Poverty poses a dramatic problem of justice; ... it is characterized by an unequal growth that does not recognize the “equal right of all people to take their seat ‘at the table of the common banquet... so that persons and peoples may “be more” and live in conditions that are more human.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no.449, p.253)

6. Pastoral theology that motivates us to engage in interreligious dialogue with people of other religions and work for the promotion of the dignity of the poor and whatever is noble and beautiful in the different cultures.

6.1. Biblical bases:

(a) The Roman Centurion: *“In truth I tell, you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this ... Go back, then: let this be done for you, as your faith demands.” (Matthew 8:13)*

(b) The Syro-Phoenecian woman: *“For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter.” (Mark 7:29)*

6.2. Message of the 1999 Special Assembly of Asian Bishops, no. 5, states that “The Church’s evangelizing mission in Asia is carried out in the context of triple dialogue with the poor, with people of other religions, and with cultures.”

7. Pastoral Theology that guides the pastoral approach to remarriage.

7.1. “The Church does not abandon those who have remarried after a divorce. She prays for them and encourages them in the difficulties that they encounter in spiritual life, sustaining them in faith and in hope.”

They “can and indeed must participate in the life of the Church. They are exhorted to listen to the Word of God, to attend the sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to perform acts of charity and take part in community projects for justice and peace, to raise the children in faith, and to nurture a spirit of penitence and works in penance in order to beseech, day after day, the grace of God.”

7.2. “Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance – which opens the way to the sacrament of the Eucharist – can only be given to those who, after repenting, are sincerely disposed to a new form of life that is no longer in contradiction with the indissolubility of marriage.”

8. Pastoral Theology and its pastoral approach to gay and lesbians.

8.1. “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is **not a sin**, it is more or less strong tendency ordered toward *an intrinsic moral evil*; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as *an objective disorder*. Only in marital relationship that the use of the sexual faculty can be morally good. A person engaging in homosexual behavior therefore acts *immorally*.” (Letter to Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, October 1, 1986).

- 8.2. “Homosexual acts “close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, March 28, 2003, in *Herald* November 23, 2003).
  - 8.3. *Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, no. 1, “Homosexuality is a troubling moral and social phenomenon.” No. 11, “The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behaviour or to legal recognition of homosexual unions.” (Document approved by John Paul II, March 28, 2003).
  - 8.4. Catechism of Catholic Church or CCC no. 2357. Homosexual acts are “acts of grave depravity. Tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are ***intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law.*** They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved (p. 505)
  - 8.5. CCC no. 2359. “Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.” (Ibid)
  - 8.6. CCC no. 2358 “Homosexuals must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.” (Ibid. Also see Letter on the pastoral care of homosexual persons, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith).
  - 8.7. The Church “shows a maternal spirit to her children, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their legitimate spouse.” (CSDC, no.226, p. 132)
9. Pastoral theology on interfaith marriages.
    - 9.1. Benedict XVI’s first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*. “For marriage is not just a sharing of bodies, but of minds, hearts and spirits too for the essential unity of man and woman that Genesis speaks of to happen.” (FABC Papers, no. 118:10)
    - 9.2. Therefore, Michael Lawler is of the firm belief that “marriage becomes a sacrament not because of some juridical effect of baptism, **but because of the active faith** of the couple.” (Michael Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Tradition: Disputed Questions*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002:51; FABC Paper, no. 118:30).

- 9.3. Catholics entering into interfaith marriages could be encouraged, if they exist, to participate in **other forms of marriage preparation** organized by the religious traditions of the future spouse”; (ii) Prepare families of the inter-faith couple to accept a person of another faith into the family”; (iii) The Catholic Church makes **a clear distinction** between **consent** and **blessing**. With the exchange of consent (**ONLY ONCE**) in the Church, a non Catholic Minister may be invited to the home for a **blessing**. (Fr. Clarence Dass, STD, “The Pastoral Response of the Church to the Challenges of Inter-Faith Marriages,” FABC Paper, no. 118:42, 47)
10. In Conclusion, Pastoral Theology is a corpus of knowledge that comes from doing pastoral reflection on our pastoral ministry in relation to person (the sick, the dying, those intend to get married, the homosexuals) so that we have the eyes and heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd. We allow Jesus to guide us so that we listen to his voice and learn to love God in our neighbour more and more.

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### References and Further Readings

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