

Institute for Christian Teaching
General Conference, Education Department

Introduction to Theology

An Experimental Course at the
Hungarian Adventist Seminary

by

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Prepared for
the International Faith and Learning Seminar
Newbold College
June 1994

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Introduction to Theology

This essay has been written in order to introduce one of the experiments of the Hungarian Adventist Seminary with the aim to establish such a subject by which the students may gain a comprehensive knowledge in the field of theological disciplines.

It is commonly known that in the line of ministerial training two models are fighting for priority: the aim of the university model is to give an academic education for the students interested in theological sciences; the aim of the ecclesiastical model is to train practical specialists for the church. The contrasting of these two models in the East-and-Middle-European institutes somehow seems to be artificial. It is not only because we consider the academic training of ministers, as well as, their spiritual and practical education equally important, but also because the aim is here to produce the elemental conditions for training of the ministers.

Earlier the obligatory visa system, as well as, the travelling conditions made difficult for Eastern-European young people to gain ministerial qualifications in Adventist institutions, and today the financial difficulties do the same. Therefore the only choice for Hungarian Union Conference was to produce the conditions for ministerial training in the country. It was agreed by the cultural department of the government, that the diplomas granted by the Adventist Seminary are recognised by the state.

For the ministerial training in our country we have the minimal conditions only: The Hungarian Union Conference rented a building from the Hungarian Pioneer Association, where we have developed dormitories, a lecture-room, a library, a computer- and music-room for sixteen theological students. Besides the material conditions theatres were needed who had doctor's degree or at least university diplomas. The conditions for ministerial training on academic level in Hungary have been produced since 1969 by a common venture, in the framework of the Council of Free Churches. In the Seminary of the Council of Free Churches ministers were trained in

collaboration of the Baptist, Adventist, Methodist and Pentecostal churches. In 1973. the above named institution concluded an agreement with the Calvinist Theological Academy in Debrecen (Hungary), and within the scope of this agreement the possibility was presented for students completing six school years to receive academic diplomas (MA) in the Calvinist Theological Academy.

Though this form of ministerial training was offensive to many, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for the time being, has twenty ministers with MA of theology diploma. Among them the leadership of the Hungarian Union Conference could select the ones, who - besides their pastoral and administrative work - teach one disciplines each.

The teachers' stress of work, the language difficulties, as well as, the small library and the lack of other means compel us to attempt to give the students enrolling in after finishing their secondary school a thorough introduction into the theological subjects upon which they might built - with self-education and possible making studies abroad - a detailed knowledge in the topics chosen by each. Thus we have come to the conclusion that in the first year we give a general introduction to the students, in which we present them the internal structure of the theological science, we teach them how to use the library, and provide them with the possibility to learn the basic principles of research and communication.

Thus early in their studies the students receive a comprehensive picture of the whole theology which they can use during their studies as a chart helping them to orient among the branches of theology. Here I tried to describe this course and give a reason for it.

This course is a three trimester course, four credit hours a week, and build itself as follows: at the first trimester we are dealing with the meaning of theology, its relation to faith, to church and give an answer to the question, whether theology is a science and if so in what sense. At the second trimester we give an overview of the history of theological thinking using texts from main theological works of certain epochs. At the third trimester we give an introduction into the research method in general and the method of theological

research in particular. By the end of the school year the students write a seminary paper which shows that they understood the basic methods of theological thinking.

The need and possibility of an introductory course of theology

The question may arise: Is there a need for a course of this kind? Is there any means we can develop and introduce such a program into our colleges and seminaries? It is a common places among specialists dealing with the content of theological studies that "the study of theology is beset by crisis in orientation. Because our access to the unity and totality that constitutes the subject matter of theology is disrupted, the domain of its subject matter and tasks has broken apart and crumbled into bewildering conglomeration of individual items."¹

As Richard A. Muller stated: "Theology suffers from a lack of direction and loss of unity among its subdisciplines. Exegesis and theological system, in particular, do not seem to function as part of a larger interpretative unity. This is, moreover, a problem that is not confined to students. The problem exists also among professionals, trained in the disciplines and charged with the task of teaching theology. We teach at a high level of sophistication, frequently with little or no concern for the way in which our subject contributes to the work of our colleagues or how the work of the entire theological faculty fits together into a greater whole for the service of Christian ministry."²

So we are facing to the problem of knowing more and more about less and less, and most theologians find practically no opportunity to acquaint themselves with the work produced in other theological subjects. This fragmentation of theological studies reflect in the knowledge of students graduating from our classes. On the positive side, of course, specialisation can

¹ Ebeling, Gerhard: *The Study of Theology*, Translated by Duane A. Priebe, Collins, London, 1979. p. 1.

² Muller, Richard A.: *The Study of Theology, From biblical interpretation to contemporary formulation*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991. p. X-XI.

mean the considerable refinement of any given subject area and a better grasp of its materials. But few theological student will be specialists: ministry by its very nature the work of a generalist who can understand Scripture and church, preach sermons, make sense out of Christian doctrine in discussion with church members, counsel with individuals, and function as an interpreter of reality in an increasingly pluralistic world.

Edward Farley in his book "Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education" states that from the beginning of the Christian faith the "theologia" had two senses: it was an actual knowledge of God (theology as wisdom), and a discipline or "science" which uses appropriate methods and issues in a body of teachings. While these two meanings were initially closely related, in the modern world fell apart as the unitary discipline of theology evolved into an aggregate of special science (only of which retained the name "theology"), and as that aspect of theology offering wisdom was displaced by practical know-how and ministerial skills, so that theologia itself was lost.³

Farley cannot find the recovery of theology by defining the relationship between the different disciplines so he suggest a new understanding of the entire theological enterprise. He states that the training of theology cannot focus on the "exercise of clerical activities", but rather it must emphasise a "general paidea" or "culturing" of human beings, a "shaping of human beings under an ideal".⁴

It is truth that the theological education need to look at the cultivation of human being, but we also have to find a hermeneutical enterprise that is larger then the interpretative ventures of each of the various theological disciplines. As Wolfhart Pannenberg puts it: "The plurality of subsidiary disciplines within theology makes it necessary to ask what is the specifically theological feature which links these disciplines. Conversely a conception of theology in general ought to be able to show to what extent its internal organisation into disciplines of exegesis, church history, dogmatics and

³ Farley, Edward: *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983. p. 31-44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152-53, 179-81.

practical theology can be defended as necessary or at least rational, or to what extent the existing divisions of theology should be critically re-examined in the light of the concept of theology, particularly as regards their mutual relations and their understanding of method... This aspect of the self-appraisal of theology... is the subject-matter of the theological encyclopaedia."⁵

Encyclopaedia is a term that is used, typically, to refer to works like Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, the Scharff-Hercog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge etc. Etymologically, however, the word offers a broader meaning. It contains three Greek components: en-cyclo-paideia. Paideia means teaching and, thus "encyclopaedia" means a complete circle or circuit of teaching. "Theological Encyclopaedia" indicates the complete circle of theological knowing, organised not alphabetically but in terms of the interrelationship of the several subject areas of theology. The Theological Encyclopaedia as an interdisciplinary course started with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who is considered as the father of the modern theology.⁶ Introductions titled as "encyclopaedia" have gradually disappeared since the Nineteenth Century but the problem has not, and the encyclopaedic model lies behind of such recent works as Gerhard Ebeling's *The Study of Theology*, and in the collections of essays have occasionally been edited to meet the same need, each discipline having its own chapter by a specialist. It is evident, however, that a collective volume cannot cure the problem but is itself a symptom of it, demanding more of theological students than is expected of their teachers.⁷

⁵ Pennenberg, Wolfhard: *Theology and Philosophy of Science*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1976. p. 5-6.

⁶ Schleiermacher, Friedrich: *A Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, Translated by Terrence N. Tice, John Knox Press, Richmond, 1966. Cf.: Kuyper, Abraham: *Principles of Sacred Theology*, Transl.: De Vries, Scribner, New York, 1898. Repr.: Baker, Grand Rapids, 1980. Garrish, B.A.: *Encyclopedia, Theological* in *A New Dictionary of Theology* by Richardson-Bowden, SCM Press, London,

⁷ Eybers-König-Stoop: *Introduction to Theology*, Third revised and enlarged edition, Pretoria, 1974. Lauret, B. and Refoulé, Fr.: *Initiation a la pratique de la théologie*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1987. Tome 1. Introduction,

The basic unity of theology

There is a necessity to find the basic unity of theology. The Theological Encyclopaedias suggested a more formal unity. Schleiermacher arranged theology into three major divisions: (1) Practical Theology as the crown of theology, dealing with the technique of church conduct. (2) Philosophical Theology, as the root of theology, dealing with the essence of Christianity under the general perspective of the essence of piety in association with the other spiritual activities of man. (3) Historical Theology, as the actual body of theological studies, in which the entire scope of theology comes under discussion as Exegesis, Church History and Dogmatics.

Originally Barth also favoured a treefold division: (1) Explication, dealing with the study and explanation of the biblical text, known as Old and New Testament Sciences. (2) Meditation, the theoretical reflection on the text, also known as Dogmatics or Systematic Theology. (3) Application, i. e. Practical Theology. In his later studies, Barth added the Church History between explication and meditation.

Eberhard Jüngel has the following division: (1) Exegesis, as the theological science of the Word of God in its textual form, (2) Church History, as the theological science of the Word of God as tradition, (3) Practical Theology, as the theological science of the Word of God as event, and (4) Dogmatics, as the theological science of the Word of God as truth.⁸

In addition to this formal unity and diversity of the theology we need to find a deeper unifying factor. As a matter of fact, there are more theological subjects that can be thought meaningfully in the Faculty of Arts. And without an unifying factor we could even ask whether they should necessarily be taught as separate theological subjects. Are sections of the Old Testament not being studied meaningfully in the department of Semitic Languages, sections of the New Testament in the department of Greek, sections of Church History in the History department, facets of Ethics in Sociology and Economics and aspects of Practical Theology in Psychology and Communication Science? Why then

⁸ König, A.: *Theology*, in *Introduction to Theology*, Pretoria, 1974. p. 38-39.

should the theological subjects be thought separately as a unity in a Theological Faculty or Seminary?⁹

Without Jesus Christ and our faith in him a separate theological science would be unnecessary. Without him there would be no basic unity among the different theological subjects. Jesus Christ has come as the promised Messiah, and his coming has given birth to Christian faith in people. And this faith has taken shape in their lives in prayer, in their profession of faith, in their worship and in their Christian life. This accepted Word, Jesus Christ, is the deepest ground for the unity and mutual interrelatedness of the theological disciplines.

Because Jesus Christ came from Israel, there is an Old Testament Science. Because as the incarnate Son of God he lived on earth, died, and rose again, there is a New Testament Science. Because as the risen Lord he brings people to faith through the Holy Spirit and gathers them into his Church, there is Church History. Because in faith his Church responds to the rule of his Word, there is Systematic Theology. And because he builds up his Church in the true faith through his Word and Spirit, there is Practical Theology.

That way we have both formal and material foundations to build up a theology as a whole. Before we could go further to define the content of the different disciplines of theology, I need to make two considerations. One is that the basis for theological reflection is both revelation and study. Theology can be defined as the study of the revelation of God perceived by men of faith and systematic studies. "Theology is the science of faith. It is the conscious and methodical explanation and explication of the divine revelation received and grasped in faith."¹⁰

The theology as the science of faith has a number of functions in the Church. Among these are clarification, integration, correction, declaration and challenge. It is a sad fact that many Christians are unclear about what they believe. They need instruction about the contents of the faith. This is a task that

⁹ König, A.: *Ibid.*: p. 13. Cf.: Pannenberg, W.: *Theology and...* p. 6.

¹⁰ Rahner, Karl cited by McGrath, Alister E.: *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993. p. 119. According Macquarrie, John: "Theology may be defined as the study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available."

theology is called to perform. Theology also need to help the Christians to bring different beliefs all together by integrating one truth with another. Theology is not only a matter of clarification of individual doctrines but also the demonstration of how these fit into a total pattern. In the teaching of theology there is the continuing effort to show how one part relates to another, to see the reality and see it whole.

Theology serves as a corrective to departure from the truth. By articulating as clearly as possible the various truths of the Christian faith, it indirectly seeks to redress imbalances or errors that may have occurred.

Another function of theology is to make known publicly what it is that the Christian community stands for. Finally theology moves into areas of Christian thought that have often proved confusing, even divisive, and seeks to discover the truth. The theology is concerned with truth, it is concerned with truth as conformity to ultimate reality.

The Architecture of Theology

Etienne Gilson once likened the great systems of scholastic theology to "cathedrals of the mind". This image seems out of place today, but the idea of theology possessing a structure remains important. So the aim of the proposed introductory course is to show to the students of the related fields of disciplines.

In the following I tray to describe the different classes of the course.

1. The sense and raison d'être of theological encyclopaedia

The aim of this lecture is to describe the encyclopaedia in general, and explain why a theological encyclopaedia is needed: to describe the theology as a science, present its disciplines and its system, and the introduce the beginner into the spirit and method of theology.

2. What is theology?

The aim of this lecture is to present the meaning of the word "Theology" in the history of the Christian Church, to show the self-appraisal of Christian Theology through the history and at the present.¹¹

3. Theology as faith seeking understanding

The aim of this lecture is to explain that theology is a science built on personal faith. Theology sets forth what the Christian faith teaches, affirms, holds to be true: its doctrines.¹²

4. Theology in the Church

Theology is a function of the Christian Church, it serves the Church and acts in a loyal but critical way in the Church. There is no private theology, the questions which the theology need to clarify come from the Church and the answers are accepted in the framework of the life of the Christian Community. This raises the question of the freedom and denominational engagement of the Theology. The aim of this lecture to introduce this subject to students.¹³

5. Theology as Science

The teachers of the Christian Church always aimed to express the faith of the Church in a scientific level. In the Middle Age theologians used the Aristotelian scientific methods: the logic, critics, dialectics etc. But we have to recognise that the theology cannot be looked at as just one science among others. Theology is a science of God and Christian faith, so it has a

¹¹ Whaling, Frank: *The Development of the word "Theology"*, Scot. Journ. of Theology, Vol. 34. (1981), p. 289-312. Ogden, Schubert: *What is Theology?* in Hodgson, P.C. and King, R.H.: *Readings in Christian Theology*, Fortress, Philadelphia, p. 15-30.

¹² Blanca, Jack J.: *Faith and Theology*, Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, Vol. 4. Number 2. (Autumn 1993), p. 20-46. Rice, Richard: *The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology From a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Spring, Michigan, 1985. p. 1-19.

¹³ Reid, George W.: *The Theologian as Conscience for the Church*, Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, Vol. 4. Number 2. (Autumn 1993), p. 12-19. Fowler, John: *Adventist Pastoral Ministry*, Pacific Press, p. 83-94.

transcendental element in it which go beyond human reason, and needs revelation and faith as starting point.¹⁴

The theology as a science has its disciplines called: Biblical, Historical, Systematic, and Practical Theology.

6. *Biblical Sciences*

The ultimate source of Christian theology is the Bible, as we know virtually nothing about Jesus Christ, except what we learn from New Testament. Christian Theology is thus obliged to wrestle with the text which transmits knowledge of him. This has the result that Christian Theology is intimately linked with the Biblical Sciences. Karoly Karner in his book "Einführung in die Theologie" (1956) devised the Biblical Sciences into tree main parts called:

(A) Preparatory Biblical Sciences like: Biblical languages, archaeology, History of Biblical Times, Introduction to the Bible, and Biblical Hermeneutics. (B) Exegesis, as an analytical science, and (C) Biblical Theology as a synthetic science.¹⁵

7. *Historical Theology*

Church and theology has a history. By the name of "Church History" or "Historical Theology" we signify those disciplines which study the historical reality of the Church as an institution, a community of believers who hold certain beliefs and religious practices. The study of the history of Christianity provides a powerful correction to static views of theology. It allows us to see (1) that certain ideas came into being under very definite circumstances, and (2) that theological development is not irreversible, the mistakes of the past may be corrected.

¹⁴ Pannenberg, Wolfhart: *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1976. Gulley, Norman F.: *The Influence of Philosophical and Scientific World Views on the Development of Theology*, Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, Vol. 4. Number 2. (Autumn 1993), p. 137-160. Hasel, Frank M.: *Theology and the Role of Reason*, *Ibid.*: p. 172-198.

¹⁵ Hasel, Gerhard F.: *Scripture and Theology*, *Ibid.*: p. 47-94. Ebeling, Gerhard: *The Study of Theology*, Collins, London, 1979. p. 13-37. Eybers-König-Stoop: *Introduction to Theology*, Pretoria, 1974. p. 43-113.

Karoly Karner in the above mentioned book devised Historical Theology as follows: (A) History of Christendom, (B) History of the Church in certain countries, the history of certain denominations, (C) History of certain activities of the Church, such as history of mission, history of Christian arts, pathology, history of Christian literature and doctrines. He considers the sociology and sociography of the Christian Church as part of Church History.¹⁶

8. Systematic Theology

The task of Systematic Theology is to understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Systematic Theology takes the materials furnished by Biblical and Historical Theology and arranges them in logical order under the great heads of theological study. Dogmatic theology is the explication and systematisation of the doctrines expressed in the symbols or professions of faith of the Church. It is often used synonymously with Systematic Theology, but under Systematic Theology are included apologetics, polemics, and biblical ethics.¹⁷

9. Practical Theology

The Practical Theology seeks to apply to practical life of the Church and the believers the things contributed by the other three departments of theology. Practical theology embraces areas such as homiletics, church organisation and administration, liturgy and worship, Christian education, and mission.¹⁸

10. Theology in relationship

In some case introductions to the study of theology include into their programs the study of religion, philosophy, social sciences etc. as part of the theology. These are scientific disciplines standing by themselves, but theology need to relate them. That way we include into the introductory course a lecture

¹⁶ Ebeling, G.: *Ibid.*: p. 67-79. Eybers-König-Stoop: *Ibid.*: p. 114-147. Congar, Yves: *Théologie historique*, in Lauret-Refoulé: *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, Éd. du Cerf, Paris, 1987. Vol. 1. p. 233-262.

¹⁷ Ebeling, G.: *Ibid.*: p. 125-152. Eybers-König-Stoop: *Ibid.*: p. 148-262.

¹⁸ Ebeling, G.: *Ibid.*: p. 109-124. Eybers-König-Stoop: *Ibid.*: p. 263-286. 310-329.

which gives at least a glimpse of what is the relationship between theology and other scientific disciplines.¹⁹

In the winter quarter we follow the same steps to go through the history of theology using extracts from such theological writers as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth etc. The aim of this part is not to present a history of doctrines but to show how the theologians worked and struggled to find and describe the Christian truth.²⁰

The last part is a methodology and guided research. We use as textbook Nancy Jean Wyhmeister's Handbook for Research, Guidelines for Theological Students.

Through this course we hope to give an overview of the theological field helping the undergraduate students to integrate the different parts of their learning into a system.

¹⁹ Ebeling, G.: *Ibid.*: p. 39-66, 81-107. Eybers-König-Stoop: *Ibid.*: p. 287-309. Erickson, Millard J.: *Christian Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983. p. 39-58.

²⁰ Gonzalez, Justo: *History of Christian Thought*. 3 vols. Abingdon, Nashville, 1974-1975. Pelican, Jaroslav: *The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 5 vols. University of Chicago, 1971-