

Theology, Science, and Culture

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1. The Challenge of Theology in the Unequal Development of Science and Culture

1.1. *The unequal development of science*

Scientific progress has resulted in so quick and dramatic changes in our human condition both socially and ethically. Scientific progress has always produced new hopes as well as new risks and uncertainties for the human race. For example, progress in science of information may accelerate and widen communication but at the same time may also threaten or endanger the quality of interhuman communication; progress in medical science may increase the life expectancy of many people but at the same time may reduce the meaning of the human body into a mere thing; and the like. In short, scientific progress and its implementation do not always increase the dignity of the human race but may also result in new paradoxes that need to be resolved.

Here are some diagnostic observations on the situation of science, especially based on our experience in Indonesia.

- *First*, specialization and professionalization in science are still so dominant that the strategy for the teaching of science in the educational institutions tends to be isolated from the other disciplines and hence fails to serve the process of humanizing the young human persons. The teaching and the development of science are no longer viewed as part of the process of bringing the youth into both intellectual and academic maturity (or as part of the *studium generale*) and are merely reduced into specialization and professionalization. Such a tendency is easily observed in Indonesian universities where specialization is adopted since the undergraduate level. In the short run it appears to be advantageous for it helps the university to speed up in producing a ready-for-use work force. In the long run and in the wider perspective, however, such a strategy may result

in impoverishing the students or worse in dehumanizing the young human persons. Hence, it even contradicts the philosophical idea of a late Indonesian Jesuit, Driyarkara, on education as a way to personalize the young persons.

- *Second*, most if not all the centers of scientific progress that has changed the face of the world are in fact located in the few but big and developed countries. The rest of the world inhabitants, that make the majority, are merely spectators and passive users of the scientific progress and all of its implementations. The majority of the world inhabitants in the less developed countries are even still struggling to overcome their ignorance and backwardness. Hence the debates around scientific progress has usually been too elitist. Consequently, people in general would not be able to participate in discussing the implementation of certain scientific progress, when in fact such an implementation would very likely affect the life of many people. In Indonesia such a situation may be found in the debate concerning transgenic plants, the Government's plan to build a nuclear reactor, and the vaccine against the avian influenza.
- *Third*, the development of certain sciences and its application in certain technology has usually been linked to certain big capital for it is really costly. For lack of capital, the collaboration between research institutions and funding agencies are often unequal. For example, research institutions do not have freedom to undertake basic research believed to be relevant for a long term scientific progress, for the more pragmatic funding agencies would not be interested in such kind of basic research.

1.2. Culture: Media culture and the culture of narcissism

Such changes in the human condition as cited above are most readily observed in the present culture we are facing today. The trinity of power that have shaped the contemporary

culture of today are: late capitalism (neoliberalism), globalization, and the new technology of information. Each power has produced certain cultural pattern with its own implications:

- **Consumer culture.** Late capitalism has turned consumption into an end in itself. At the cultural level, such capitalism has created what is known as consumer culture, in the sense that culture has been and will always be placed within the context of commodity. Consumption does no longer serve to fulfill human needs, i.e. the needs for use value, but has evolved into a way of life. Even local cultures that serve to be the source of identity and local human languages have been transformed into commodity especially through the tourism industry. The value of a culture is eventually measured from its marketability. Such culture has also either directly or indirectly transformed the fundamental values of communal life into economic categories: cultural interactions turn into economic transactions, cultural groups into corporate cultures, intellectual ascetism into entrepreneurship, arts into business, and the like.
- **Media culture.** The new information technology has given birth to what is called the media culture. Almost all of our human experiences have been mass-mediated. The media culture becomes problematic when we come to know who is in control of the mass media. The old role of the media as the fourth pillar of democracy is now seriously questioned for it is monopolized by the capital.
- **Globalization.** Globalization has often been conceived as an opportunity where the interhuman interaction is no longer restricted by the boundaries of either geography, race, or nationality. Globalization offers the hope for a wider solidarity, a deeper understanding of each other, and the like. However, we cannot reject the fact that globalization is economical in the first place. Hence it is not surprising that

globalization has in fact been practiced more as a free promotional activity or a market with no borders and limitations. Globalization means more the penetration of both capital and cultural powers without any protections. Although we could never check the certain waves of globalization, we could neither ignore or neglect our responsibility to protect the cultural groups from such a pitiless penetration.

1.3. The possible locus theologicus

- It is understandable that such a world of science and culture as cited above (at least based on the Indonesian experience) failed to be given serious considerations to be one of possible *locus theologicus* in our institutions of theological education.
- The pressure and burden posed on theology to prepare future workers of the Church (which in fact is important) have often rendered our institutions of theological education alienated and alienating.
- Scientific development has clearly shown that the world and humanity could not be explained merely in terms of ‘a single idea’ nor ‘a single way of thinking’. How would plurality be possibly understood on the basis of merely ‘a single and universal mind’? Pluralism itself poses a serious challenge to Theology: To what extent could Theology fight against the tendency to be monolithic, universal, and absolute? To what extent could Theology scrutinize the various life struggles and fight against the tendency to busy itself on the merely metaphysical? What is urgently needed to be done is to develop a Theology that is post-metaphysical. It would be a Theology with a more holistic perspective and that would take all sides into its considerations, and hence would be more ‘locally rooted’.

2. An Ethical Problem: Moral Insecurity

Uneven scientific progress and cultural domination reduced into economical categories has proved to harm the quality of one's communication with others as well as with oneself. Such a situation may result in what may be called moral insecurity in its various forms in many communities regardless of their religious or ideological backgrounds. Moral insecurity would emerge when one fails to get the appropriate and sufficient knowledge to understand what is happening in one's surroundings and hence it would be difficult for him or her to take truly genuine moral options. Moral insecurity would result in communalism, i.e. the practice of a communal life where priority for ownership and interest is given to a particular group rather than to the community as a whole. Here are some examples of the symptoms of moral insecurity characterized by communalism.

- **Radicalism.** One symptom of moral insecurity characterized by communality is radicalism in its various forms, be it fought for religious, ethnic, xenophobic, or any other cause. Such radicalism would really be horrifying when it would be expressed in any terrorizing forms. Basically radicalism emerges from a moral insecurity in those who would like to deligitimate an unjust situation but at the same time do not have the necessary power to exert changes and create a counter-culture. It is important to note that they usually consist of young people who are pious and energetic but who fail to explain their situation in a rational way and tend to always see themselves as victims. Radicalism may be viewed as an ethical problem in the sense that such a group fails to ethically problematize their situation and tend to see their surroundings as either black or white. The former Indonesian president, Abdurrahman Wahid, one of the Moslem

partners of the Sanata Dharma University, had always encouraged to fight against the emerging radicalism in Indonesia at any risks.

- **Spiritualism and naive moralism.** Another symptom of moral insecurity characterized by communalism is spiritualism or naive moralism. By spiritualism we mean spiritual immaturity in the sense of the tendency to compel oneself to use religious jargons in explaining one's surroundings with no prior scientific and analytic observations. Spiritualism is usually followed by (naive) moralism rather than ethical reflections. In relation to this, 'faith' as the relation between God and man needs also to be understood as a 'communication initiative' that is realized in the human action that is 'profane' and at the same time 'directed towards a positive social transformation'.

3. The Opportunity of Jesuit Universities: 100% Jesuit, 100% University

In the midst of a situation where higher learning institutions have to comply to the demands of the Government bureaucracy and the market, within the boundaries of freedom that they still hold Jesuit higher learning institutions have the opportunity to exert themselves as alternative higher learning institutions with a paradigm that enables science, culture, and theology (with a special emphasis on ethics) to critically interact with each other. It is the most appropriate time to realize the mandate of the 34th General Congregation that Jesuit universities should be one hundred percents Jesuit and one hundred percents university. For the present times one hundred percents Jesuit should be reflected in universities that have the capacity to *uphold back the human dignity by restoring genuine human communication and interaction and protecting them from the danger of the culture of transactions*. Whereas one hundred percents university for the present times would mean restoring our universities as a place to *seek truth (with the risk of having to restore intellectual ascetism) and not merely as*

a place to prepare various kinds of professional dictated by both the market and the state (although such a function may not be entirely ignored). In the context of Indonesia, this mandate had actually been exemplified by the life and work of the late Mangunwijaya, a diocesan priest and architect as well as novelist, who had tirelessly reminded that catholic education must not be succumbed into – borrowing his words – the hands of the ‘caesar’ and the ‘market’.

We have to admit that such an ideal would not so easily be achieved since young universities like those in Indonesia are still fighting for public acknowledgment for their institutional existence. To maintain their existence some Jesuit higher learning institutions have to succumb to pragmatism and lose their critical and visionary power. Such a choice is really not easy. However it should never be an excuse for any of us to spare oneself from the duty to realize such a noble and challenging mandate of the 34-th General Congregation.

In particular Jesuit universities should pay a special attention to the arts with the belief and hope that the arts may serve the meeting point of culture, science, and theology. In societies where the arts have been reduced to be a mere entertainment, a mere commodity; Jesuit universities have the noble task to restore the function of the arts as one of the language of humanity.

4. Roadmap in Science and Research Projects on Culture and Theology

Due to our lack of experience in the field of science, we are not able to propose an appropriate research project right now. As a preliminary step, however, we are proposing a roadmap for the teaching and the development of science. As for the fields of culture and theology, we are proposing some research projects.

- **A roadmap for the development of science.** A roadmap for the development of science tailored to the needs and capacities of the local societies needs to be developed. Such a roadmap should include a funding scheme that provides enough freedom to the researchers.
- **Radicalism in the media culture.** One possible research topic would be ‘Radicalism in the media culture’. The media culture that tends to entertain sensation may result in increasing radicalism. From such a research we may develop an alternative media culture that gives priority to the values of friendship and tolerance without being subject to propaganda.
- **A roadmap for the development of a theology.** One possible research project in the field of theology would be the development of a Moral Theology that may serve as social ethics in developing a civil society. The focus or emphasis would be an effort to help people to be able to have a capability to make concrete choices and decisions when they have to confront with different and sometimes contradictory values, in their struggle to personalize their character in their interaction in a social network. Hence both moral consideration and action should be based on the principle that no one should be sacrificed for the good of the public, neither that one may give priority only to his or her own interest and ignore his or her social relations. Such a research may also fulfill the need for developing a ‘Contextual Theology’ with a ‘bottom-up’ approach.

5. Possible Wider Collaboration

5.1. Collaboration in developing a roadmap for the development of science.

Based on our experience in Indonesia, we need the collaboration with:

- Knowledgeable persons and/or institutions that have a rich experience in teaching science as part of *studium generale*, not as a field of specialization.
- Knowledgeable persons and/or institutions that have succeeded in developing science that is locally oriented.
- Knowledgeable persons and/or institutions that have succeeded in developing people-oriented medicine.

5.2. Collaboration in studying radicalism in the media culture.

Based on our experience in Indonesia, we need the collaboration with:

- Knowledgeable persons and/or institutions that have succeeded in developing the alternative media to produce a counter culture: a lived culture that is not dominated by the market industry.
- Knowledgeable persons and/or institutions that have succeeded in developing the alternative media to build a face to face community.

5.3. Collaboration in developing a roadmap for the development of a Contextual Theology

In response to the concerns of the Society of Jesus as developed in the General Congregations, including the 35-th General Congregation, and the challenge of the Church in Asia, and in the attempt to develop contextual theologies, the Jesuit in the East Asia and Oceania Assistancy has developed a program called *East Asia Theological Encounter Program* (EATEP). This program has been developed to meet the need of the young Jesuits from various backgrounds to discuss together and make a theological reflection within the framework of East Asian realities, for a certain definite period, in accompaniment of some tutors. In this moment, the program is set up in Thailand with a specific accent on Buddhism and to a certain degree also Islam.

In line with this, we propose to run such kind of East Asia Theological Encounter Program on Islam in Indonesia. The project is supported by the fact that Indonesia has great diversity, in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, culture, language, etc., and moreover Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population. No doubt, the two programs developed in the scope of the EATEP, on Buddhism in Thailand and on Islam in Indonesia, can complement each other. In fact, the program has been approved by the Jesuit in the East Asia and Oceania Assistancy, and will take effect starting from January 2011 under the umbrella of the University of Sanata Dharma in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.