

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THEOLOGY FROM AN EMPIRICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This conference wishes to primarily focus on how the various specializations in theology actually dialogue with particular non-theological fields of knowledge today. Based on this idea, I am inspired to reflect on the empirical-theological method in theology as practiced by the Department of Empirical Theology at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. To start with, I share with you my theological background. I started my Ph.D. studies in theology in September 2000 and finished April 19 of this year at the Radboud University Nijmegen (the former Catholic University of Nijmegen) in the Netherlands. It means that I am a neophyte in the theological discipline which I am about to share. As a beginner, it would be pretentious to say that I have mastered everything in this particular field.

This paper consists of four parts: The first part is a presentation of the empirical-theological cycle method as popularized by Johannes van der Ven¹ at the department of Empirical Theology, Radboud University Nijmegen. I will acquaint you about its brief history and will attempt to explain some underlying principles behind this method. The second part is an illustration of the way I applied it in my own research project which is entitled: “Spirituality and Quality of Life: An Empirical-Theological Exploration among the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands.” The third part is a presentation of the interdisciplinarity in theology from the perspective of the empirical-

1. Prof. Dr. Johannes van der Ven is a professor in Pastoral Theology and Director of the Department of Empirical Theology at the Radboud University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands. I did my studies under his guidance.

theological method. Finally, I end this paper with a brief conclusion and recommendation.

A. PRACTICAL-EMPIRICAL THEOLOGY: A BACKGROUNDER

I would say that practical-empirical theology is an attempt to make theology relevant to the people of the present generations especially in the European context where secularisation is very rampant. Van der Ven (1998) points out that Western theology is confronted with the question on how the major themes of Christian faith can be made relevant to present and future generations. It has to provide systematic and methodical answers to empirical questions and to integrate these answers in theological thought. For instance, theology must be able to provide answers on when and how modern people have religious experiences, which religious attitudes have an impact on their individual and social life, how they participate in the life of the community, how does the relationship between church and society take shape in ordinary life? Practitioners of practical and empirical theology realize that it is important not to leave the research on these issues to the social sciences alone, but to try to formulate, analyse and answer these questions from a distinctive theological point of view.

The Radboud University of Nijmegen has a long history of pastoral-empirical theological research. According to Van der Ven,² the first chair for pastoral theology in the Netherlands was established in 1964 at the Faculty of Theology in Nijmegen. At the same time, two additional chairs were established in the faculty of social sciences, one for sociology of religion and the other for psychology of religion. From the beginning, it was the intention of both these faculties to develop a multidisciplinary concept for training and research in pastoral theology. It was understood that all three disciplines would deal with the same pastoral and ecclesiastical problems, albeit from a different point of view.

2. J. Van der Ven, *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach* (Leuven Peeters Press, 1998), 1-3.

At that early stage, the research method used was called a “two-phase model” in which a socio-scientific description and analysis of a particular pastoral theme was followed by theological reflection. In the long run, this two-phase model was judged to be inadequate to pastoral theology. The first reason is that socio-scientific research was generally proven to be an inadequate tool for dealing with pastoral and ecclesiastical problems raised in pastoral theology. The second reason is to be found in the insufficiently defined methodology of theological reflection. The third reason, finally concerns the differences between the social sciences and theology with regard to their respective formal subjects, the question of normativity and the paradigms involved. Ten years later, the Nijmegen Department of Pastoral Theology, in response to the aforementioned problems, shifted from a multidisciplinary approach to an “intradisciplinary” approach. Intradisciplinary means, generally speaking, that the methodology of one discipline (in this case the empirical sciences) is adopted by another (in this case pastoral theology). Thus, beginning in 1975, theologians at the Radboud University Nijmegen began applying the methodology of empirical research to the field of Pastoral Theology in order to describe, analyse and explain pastoral and ecclesiastical problems from their own particular theological point of view. Just as the exegetes apply the methods of linguistics and literary theory, church historians and theological historians utilize the methodology of historical sciences, and systematic theologians employ the systematic procedures of philosophy, so too the pastoral theologians wield the tools and techniques of the empirical sciences in order to gain a better understanding of the theological questions of particular interest to them and solve their own theological problems. Over the next several years, this intradisciplinary approach to pastoral theology at the University of Nijmegen came to be referred to as “empirical theology.”³

3. Ibid. See also Rico Ponce, “Spirituality: An Empirical-Theological Approach?” in *Hiyang: Papers of the Colloquium on Research Methodologies in the Study of Spiritualities in the Philippines*, eds. C. Buenafe, E. Gerlock and R. Ladaga (Quezon City: Center for Spirituality-Manila, 2005), 112-115.

B. THE EMPIRICAL-THEOLOGICAL CYCLE METHOD

After having told the brief history of practical-empirical theology, I will now introduce the “empirical-theological cycle method” as presented by Van der Ven.⁴ This method was developed taking into account the early experiences in pastoral theology at the Radboud University Nijmegen.

In this method, five phases are followed: 1) development of theological problem and goal; 2) theological induction; 3) theological deduction; 4) empirical-theological testing; and 5) theological evaluation. I shall now briefly describe each of these phases.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND GOAL

This asks the question “What makes a problem and a goal of theological and empirical research into a theological problem and a theological goal.”

a. THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM DEVELOPMENT

It is faith in God which comprises the theological nature of empirical-theological research. Faith in God is the direct object while God in and through faith comprises the indirect object. Such a statement suggests many different problems which cannot be dealt with at once. For example the plurality of contemporary interpretations of fundamental metaphors and symbols of the Christian tradition, as held by various groups, might be one of the objects of investigation. Or one might wish to study the pluriformity of attitudes towards the values which are attributed to these metaphors and symbols. It is also conceivable to examine the institutional pattern which communicates the value of metaphors and symbols given that many of these patterns are fixed by church structure and doctrine.

4. J. Van der Ven, *Practical Theology*, 119-156.

b. DEVELOPMENT OF A THEOLOGICAL GOAL

Faith in God is not merely the object of empirical-theological research; it is the ultimate goal of this research as well. For example, the empirical study of attitudes toward theodicy is carried out in order to formulate diagnostic and communicative aids which can be used by ministers in their pastoral conversation with people who suffer serious afflictions.⁵ The empirical analysis of a catechetical project is intended to aid in the development of effective religious learning processes.⁶

The fundamental connection of empirical theology with the rest of the theological disciplines lies in hermeneutic-communicative praxis of faith as the object, goal and condition of empirical-theological research. It is this definition of object, goal and condition in terms of mutual interrelationships that makes empirical theology a theological discipline. It also separates profoundly from empirical disciplines within the social sciences, such as psychology and sociology of religion, which are concerned with religion as a purely psychic or social factor. The same applies to pastoral psychology and pastoral sociology, at least to the extent that these disciplines are conceived as applied psychology and psychology of religion in the truest sense.

2. THEOLOGICAL INDUCTION

Theological induction takes into consideration such procedures like: theological reflection, formulation of the theological question and the empirical research design.

a. THEOLOGICAL PERCEPTION

Perception occupies an important place in the induction phase. However, perception does not arise simply from the accumulation of facts free from the influence of any theoretical

5. J. Van der Ven and E. Vossen, *Suffering: Why For God's Sake?* (Kampen: J. H. KOK Publishing House, 1995).

6. J. A. M. Siemerink, *Het Gebed in de Religieuze vorming. Empirisch Onderzoek naar de Effecten van Gebededucatie bij Volwassenen*, Serie Theologie en Empirie, Deel 5 (Kampen, 1987).

preconception. There is no such thing as theory-free facts. Facts are always perceived from within some kind of mental frame of reference. The framework of empirical-theological research implies a dialectic within which perceptions of hermeneutic-communicative praxis are continually occurring or being collected. An empirical theologian might take into account the following distinctions: Random vs systematic perception, Participatory vs non-participatory perception, Overt vs covert perception, Indirect and direct perceptions, and Perception of others and perception of self.

b. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The phase of theological induction, as already noted, consists of the interaction between perception and reflection. The relationship between the two therefore is not a sequential one but a kind of dialectical interplay. Whenever some perceptions have been acquired, the results are subjected to a closer review, i.e, to reflection, and one seeks to arrive at some preliminary conclusions which in turn may lead one to place subsequent perceptions into a more specific or more accurate perspective.

The act of reflection requires that two conditions be satisfied. The first is that the researcher must have a sufficient knowledge of the theoretical literature relevant to the subject area. The second criterion is that s/he must acquire a knowledge and understanding of the empirical literature pertinent to the problem being investigated.

The first criterion is necessary to ensure that reflection on one's perception is guided by a theory. The study of theoretical literature may sharpen and add depth to one's reflections. In the case of empirical-theological research, the relevant theoretical literature consists primarily of relatively recent theological literature, especially exegetical works, works of systematic and practical theology as well as publications in the field of philosophy and the social sciences.

The second condition that must be satisfied before proper reflection may begin is an overview of the relevant empirical research literature in both empirical theology and the social sciences. The empirical findings of other researchers may cast a new light on one's own observations, reinforcing them or putting them into perspective and complementing them.

c. FORMULATION OF THEOLOGICAL QUESTION

The number and variety of logical and empirical aspects to be considered in the perception and reflection phases compel one to move beyond the theological problem definition to a framing of the theological question. There are three categories of criteria that may be applied. The first of these has to do with the scientific relevance of the problem or the question, as the case may be. The relevance will depend on the kind of research one intends and is able to pursue. If one merely wishes to describe facts without trying to provide any kind of explanatory connections, the questions will be of a rather elementary nature. If it happens that many things need to be explored about the relations of the research object to other factors, it will be necessary to move into an empirical exploration of the relatively new field. If, however, a body of such knowledge already exists, one can proceed to the verification or falsification of the hypotheses that are derived from this knowledge. This can be illustrated as follows:

A continuum of research form

Descriptive Explorative Hypothesis testing



2. THEOLOGICAL DEDUCTION

This includes important procedures like: theological conceptualisation, determination of theological-conceptual model and theological operationalization.

a. THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

Criteria: free from logical inconsistencies, independent and necessary.

b. DETERMINATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL-CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The elaboration of the theological-conceptual model is very important because it determines further the operational method as well as the subsequent analytical technique. On the basis of the general methodological literature it can be assumed that a theological-conceptual model must contain three things: concepts or variables, relationship between the concepts or variables, and the research units.

c. THEOLOGICAL OPERATIONALIZATION

The theological concepts obtained from the theological theory formation cannot, of course, be applied to empirical reality directly. The gap between the theoretical concepts and the empirical reality must be bridged by an intervening step: the operationalization of theological concepts. Operationalization is the defining of concepts in terms of operations. The concepts must be reformulated in such a way that it would include a description of the operations by which one can determine whether the phenomena referred to by the concepts occur in the empirical reality. The process of operationalization transforms the theoretical concepts or variables into empirical ones.

4. EMPIRICAL-THEOLOGICAL TESTING

This consists of data collection, preparation of the data set and empirical-theological data analysis.

a. DATA COLLECTION

Once the questionnaire has been finalized, the phase of data collection can begin. An avoidable question that arises concerns the group whom one wishes to study. This question really consists of two separate aspects, namely what is the population that one wishes to study, and what sample (also known as research population) will be drawn from the population as a whole, an example of which is random sampling. The way in which the sample is selected can best be likened to a lottery. Cards bearing the name of one element of the total population are thoroughly mixed and then a predetermined number of cards are drawn, as from a lottery drum. Or one may use a non-random sample, snow-bowl sampling, etc.

b. PREPARATION OF THE DATA SET

The preparation of the data set consists of the following activities: entering the data into the computer, checking and cleaning the data.

Entering the data into the computer is done with the help of a code book containing a description of the coding process for the questionnaires filled out by the respondents. Coding consists of assigning numbers to the values of the variables which are listed in the data matrix. The respondents' codes are shown along the vertical arm of the matrix, the variables along the horizontal arm.

A code book contains the following elements: a) the records (e.g., record 1, record 2 and so on); b) the number of the question in the questionnaire; c) column on the 80-column card to which the numbers in the questionnaire refer; d) the description of the variable content (varname); e) the description of the variable label; and f) the description of the values which the values can take on along with the corresponding names (value labels) including the missing values.

Data cleaning refers to the process of inspecting the data tables. One should look at the measures of central tendency (arithmetic mean, median and modal) and variance. For example, if the values for a particular item scatter very widely, it is likely that this item will function poorly later on during the scale construction on the basis of the factor analysis.

c. EMPIRICAL-THEOLOGICAL DATA ANALYSIS

Once the preparatory activities like data entry, data checking and data cleaning have been completed, the empirical-theological data analysis can begin. In present-day empirical-theological survey research, the following phases can be distinguished: a) description of the research population; b) construction of theological and other attitudinal scales; c) determination of the holders of theological attitudes; d) determination of the context of theological attitudes; and e) explanation of the theological attitudes.

d. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION

The research population can be described by a number of background variables using univariate tables. Background variables

include age, sex, degree of education and occupation, etc. It is often necessary and useful to reduce the values which background variables can take according to the code book to a smaller number of categories. Taking into consideration the collected data, one might for example group the ages of respondents into classes consisting of ten-year periods. Values for level of education can also be reduced to three or four classes.

**e. CONSTRUCTION OF THE THEOLOGICAL
AND OTHER ATTITUDINAL SCALES**

After the sample has been described, the theological and other attitudinal scales must be constructed. The construction of attitudinal scales is important for two reasons: to determine the structure of items and to reduce the data. One basic principle must always be followed, that is, the construction phase of the attitudinal scales (Phase A) must always be completed before beginning the next phases in which the relationships between attitudinal scales and background variables (Phase B), between different attitudinal scales (Phase C) are developed. In other words: Construct the scales first then test the resulting explanations.

Two scale construction techniques are currently important in the practice of empirical-theological research: scalogram analysis and factor analysis. The scalogram analysis seeks to determine whether a particular group of measured variables is cumulative in nature. The aim is to see whether the data can be placed along a continuum running from a lesser to a greater degree of difficulty (cf. Swanborn 1982). Factor analysis is aimed at discovering a shared latent or hypothetical variable (factor) that is assumed to be present in a particular group of measured variables. For factor analysis, the following criteria can be used: Eigen value $e > 1.00$; explained variance $e > .40$; factor loading $e > .40$; communality $e > .20$.

Coupled with factor analysis is the analysis of reliability which examines the precision of the scales that can be formed on the basis of factor analysis. Precision here means "reproducibility" or "repeatability", and indicates the degree to which the attitude in question would yield the same results in subsequent measurements.

f. IDENTIFYING THE HOLDERS OF THEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES

Once the theological and other attitude scales have been formed, numerous relationships can be studied. One can begin with the holders of theological attitudes. Who is it that holds positive or negative attitudes towards the theological symbols that were previously studied? To what groups do they belong? To answer these questions one may seek to study the connections between the theological attitude scales and the background variables. For example, based on the theological-conceptual model described earlier, one can try to establish the relationship between the gender of the respondents and a particular theological attitude that is the relationship between the distribution of men and women in the research population and a theological attitude. In similar manner, one can also try to identify relationships with other population characteristics like age and level of education.

Various statistical methods can be used for this purpose. For instance, one may apply association analysis, variance analysis and correlation analysis. These techniques allow one to determine whether a relationship exists between two variables and if so, how strong the relationship is. At the same time one can determine the significance of the relationship, which indicates the probability that this relationship would occur by chance (often expressed as $p < .05$). This is important if the results of the sample are to be generalized to the population as a whole. The choice of the analytical method is determined by the measurement level of the dependent as well as the independent variables. For example, if the dependent and independent variables are at the nominal level, Cramer's measure (Cramer's V) can be used. The relevance criterion is assumed at Cramer's $V = e^{.15}$. If the dependent variable is at the interval level and the independent variable at the nominal or ordinal level, the variance analysis may be applied. The eta coefficient gives the strength of the association between the mean value of the dependent variables of two or more groups. The relevance criterion $\eta = 0.15$ is often used. The Scheffe test provides information about the significance of the mean value of the various groups ($p < .05$). If the dependent, as well as the independent variables are interval-scaled, the correlation analysis can be used. Attitude values measured with the help of the Likert scale are often correlated in this way. The Likert scale is at the ordinal level and consists, for example, of five choices reading:

“strongly disagree”; “disagree”; “partly disagree/partly agree”; “agree” and “strongly agree”.

g. DETERMINATION OF THE CONTEXT OF THEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES

Having identified the holders of the theological attitudes, the empirical theologian can now determine the context in which these attitudes occur. He or she is concerned here with the attitudinal character of the context, which can be determined by studying the relationship between theological attitudes and other attitudes with the help of variance analysis and correlation analysis. The determination of the context is theologically relevant because theological attitudes do not exist in a vacuum. They are always situated in a context that is in a dialectic relationship with the attitudes.

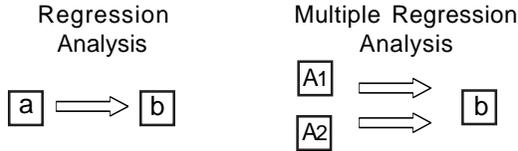
h. EXPLANATION OF THEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES

Having analysed the context in which the theological attitudes occur, one must seek to explain them, that is, s/he must seek to determine the underlying cause and effect relations. The correlation analysis merely identifies the existence of relationships, which may be weak or strong, positive or negative, but does not say anything about the causal direction of this relationship. The fact that a relationship exists between variable A and variable B does not tell us whether variable A influences variable B or vice versa. In the causal analysis one now proceeds to test the presumed causal direction of the relationship between A & B.

Two methods from the point of view of their relevance for empirical rtheology are regression analysis and path analysis. They predict the direction of the relationship that has been identified by means of correlation analysis. In other words, they do not simply indicate that variable A is related to variable B, but also that variable A is a predictor of variable B.

There are two kinds of regression analysis: regression analysis and multiple regression analysis. In the first, only one independent variable A is involved in explaining the dependent variable B. In the second there are a number of independent variables A1, A2, etc. which explain a dependent variable B. The main question is how

much influence each individual independent variable exerts on the dependent variable and to what degree the variance of the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables. This can be illustrated as follows:



These diagrams can be elucidated by some examples with the help of the simple theological-conceptual model described earlier. The regression analysis, for example, is applicable when one wishes to investigate whether a particular theological attitude (variable b) can be explained by the gender (a) of the respondents. A multiple regression analysis can be used if one wishes to investigate the relative weight of two background variables, both of which are supposed to influence a particular theological attitude (b): sex (a1) and education (a2). The measures which are important in regression analyses are the explained variance in the dependent variables (R^2) and the weight of the influence of the independent variable or variables on the dependent variable (\hat{a}). R^2 e".30 may be used as the relevant criterion.

5. THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

In the phase of theological evaluation, the results of the testing are related back to the original problem and goals which formed the starting point for the empirical-theological research. In this, three aspects can be distinguished: theological interpretation, theological reflection and theological-methodological reflection.

a. THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

We speak of theological interpretation because the numerical results obtained in the preceding analytical phase do not in themselves provide an answer to the theological question. Rather, the results need to be interpreted. This means that they must be placed in the theological context.

b. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

It is based on the results of the theological interpretation that theological reflection takes place. This reflection consists of a critical discussion of two things: the meaning and relevance of the results of the theological reflection and the adequacy of the structure and execution of the empirical-theological study that has yielded the results. The results of the empirical-theological study do not represent a definitive endpoint. To avoid the danger of empiricism, the results need to be placed within a broader theological framework, namely, in a hermeneutic-theological evaluation. They are not simply the endpoint of the empirical-theological cycle, but the potential beginning of such a new cycle. Empiricism itself can never be used to judge the worth or non-worth of the results obtained. Empirical facts are meaningful only when they are placed within a hermeneutical context of theological concepts and theories and evaluated from within the context. Assuming that the majority of the population studied shows a stronger preference for attitude towards retribution theodicy than that of the compassion model of theodicy (which incidentally is not the case), it would be wrong to conclude from this that theology must attribute greater value to the former theodicy model than to the latter, and therefore that it should pay more attention to the retribution model than the compassion symbol. At the same time, however, it would be wrong to conclude that the theologian should simply ignore this hypothetical result because it did not agree with his theological understanding or even because it is objectionable according to his views. This hypothetical case should incite the theologian to careful consideration and reflection. He should ask himself why people are exhibiting this preference? On what theological condition this phenomenon might be based? What these theological conditions mean and what place they should occupy in renewed hermeneutical-theological reflection?

c. THEOLOGICAL-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Theological-methodological reflection comprises two aspects. The first concerns the methodological prerequisites for and implications of empirical-theological research as a whole while the second has to do with the individual phase of the empirical-theological cycle.

The question here is when and how particular-theological paradigms may be properly used, to what degree and whether or not this has been done, and whether or not the methodological consequences of this process have been adequately taken into account.

C. APPLICATION IN MY OWN RESEARCH

After presenting the empirical-theological cycle method of Van der Ven, I will now share with you in what way did I apply it in my research with the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands.⁷

1. DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND GOAL

In empirical research, one needs to have a clear grasp of the things he/she wants to study. One needs to have an appropriate theoretical framework that serves as the basis for making all sorts of decisions on scientific and legitimate grounds. Devoid of a clear definition of the thing to be studied, one may end up with nothing more than a kind of market research in which the scientific theorizing is either disregarded or pushed aside.⁸

My research project dealt with spirituality and quality of life. It was undertaken because spirituality can be viewed as an important factor in the quality of life. This research aimed to offer insights about spirituality in terms of spiritual attitudes and spiritual practices and about quality of life in terms of attitudes toward the moral conditions in the quality of life and toward the moral values and norms in the quality of life. In addition to that, this research aimed to offer insights about the relationship between spirituality and quality of life. In order to accomplish these aims, it attempted to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) What is spirituality? (Chapter 1)
- 2) What are the spiritual attitudes toward God?

7. R. Ponce, *Spirituality and Quality of Life: An Empirical-Theological Exploration among Filipino Migrants in the Netherlands* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2006).

8. J. Van der Ven, J. Dreyer and H. Pieterse, *Is there a God of Human Rights? The Complex Relationship between Human Rights and Religion: A South African Case* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004).

- (Chapter 2)
- 3) What are the spiritual attitudes toward Jesus?
(Chapter 3)
 - 4) What are the spiritual attitudes toward the Holy Spirit?
(Chapter 4)
 - 5) What are the spiritual attitudes toward suffering?
(Chapter 5)
 - 6) What are the spiritual attitudes toward salvation
(Chapter 6)
 - 7) What are the attitudes toward the quality life
(Chapter 7)
 - 8) What kind of relationships exists between spiritual attitudes and quality of life attitudes?
(Chapter 8, section 3)
 - 9) Does the relationship between spiritual attitudes and quality of life attitudes change when the variation in spiritual practice is taken into account?
(Chapter 8, section 4)

The research population of my study are the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands. They were chosen on the grounds that they possess an interesting characteristic. In relation to spirituality, the Philippines is well known for the high spiritual practice of its people. But since Filipinos in the Netherlands are exposed to a secularized context, it is interesting to know how they are affected by this new cultural environment. In relation to quality of life, the fact that they are migrants in the Netherlands is enough reason to ask about their quality of life because migrants are exposed to all kinds of circumstances they may consider strange.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research-design is that of a survey with a descriptive aim. Since I aim to offer a conceptual and empirical account of the various spiritual attitudes and quality of life attitudes, explored in a relatively large population, I employed a survey method that is best suited to chart many characteristics of many respondents with the help of sampling, carried out in one measurement. Since the literature does not provide strong hypotheses about the relationship between

these spiritual attitudes and quality of life attitudes, and empirical researching is lacking, I will neither test the hypotheses about this relationship nor even explore them, but describe the relationships to be found in my empirical research, which makes my project a descriptive one. But this does not prevent me from generating proposals for further research at the end of my study.

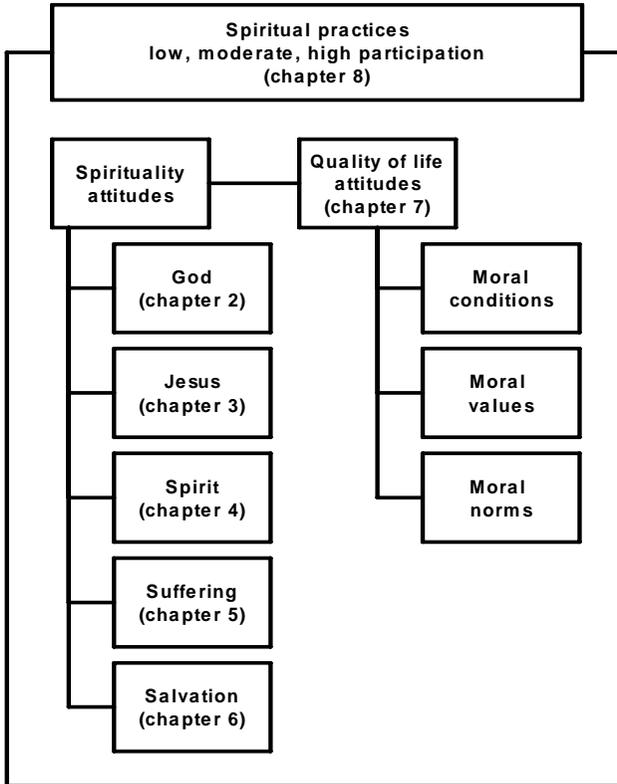


Figure 1: Overview of the Research Design

3. THEOLOGICAL INDUCTION

In empirical-theological research, the object of study ought to be explained from the perspective of theology. For the development of a theoretical framework, theological literatures relevant to the study should be gathered. They could be derived

from scriptures, systematic studies, history, doctrinal pronouncements, etc.

In my research project about the spirituality of the Filipinos in the Netherlands, the first dilemma I encountered was what kind of definition of spirituality should I use which can be measurable in nature. As we all know, spirituality is a very complex matter. It can mean many things and it can be understood in many different ways. Because of the complexity of the term spirituality, one may succumb to the idea that it is impossible to do an empirical research in spirituality. In empirical research, one needs the humility to accept that not all aspects and dimensions of an object of study can be covered in a research project. That is why one needs to clearly define the scope and limitations of the study and to clearly define the concepts involved in the study.

In connection with my research project, I defined spirituality only in terms of the beliefs and practices of the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands. My first task then was to look for a definition of spirituality that would take into account theirs. After a thorough study and reflection of the ideas of Waaijman, I suggest that spirituality—Christian spirituality in particular — could be better understood if we approach it in terms of the religious beliefs and religious practices of the people. Waaijman defines spirituality as the divine-human relational process.⁹ God and the person engage in a dynamic relationship with each other. According to Waaijman, spirituality is realized in a concrete tradition and is articulated in different forms of expressions.¹⁰ Waaijman's use of the term "traditions and different forms of expressions" made me think that spirituality is present in the belief system and practices of the people embodied in a particular religion. Considering that more than 90% of the Filipinos in the Philippines are Christians, predominantly Catholics, in my research project I sought a definition of spirituality from a Judeo-Christian perspective (with Filipino flavour). I argue that their spirituality must have its core in the Trinity. Thus, I argued that their attitudes towards

9. K. Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundation, Methods* (Leuven-Paris, Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002), 427.

10. K. Waaijman, *A Course Reader: Phenomenology of Spirituality* (Titus Brandsma Institute/Nijmegen Graduate School of Theology, 2001), 45.

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit must be taken into account. Aside from these three themes, the theme of suffering and salvation were also included. Suffering stirs one's relationship with God while "salvation" is the one that gives people hope to make sense of their suffering.

These five themes were conceptualized based on the following dimensions: height, length and breadth. Height refers to the dynamic tension between transcendence and immanence. Length refers to dynamic tension between past, present and future. Breadth refers to the dynamic tension between existential proximity and distance.

4. THEOLOGICAL DEDUCTION

In the empirical-theological cycle of Van der Ven, the third phase is called theological deduction. This is sub-divided into three aspects: theological conceptualisation, theological conceptual model and theological operationalization.

Applying this insight to spirituality, this implies that after exploring theoretically relevant literature on a particular theme of spirituality, elaboration of basic concepts involved in the study has to follow. Again, I cite as an example my research on the attitudes toward suffering among the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands.

a. CONCEPTUALIZATION

On the basis of the literature regarding suffering, I developed nine theoretical attitudes toward suffering. The first one is the retribution model of suffering which is related to the notion that as the human being copes with suffering s/he thinks that God is punishing him/her for his/her misdeeds in the past. The second is the plan model of suffering pertaining to the idea that as the human being copes with suffering s/he thinks that God planned this suffering in order to make him/her a better and greater person. The third is the didactic model referring to the perception that as the human being copes with suffering s/he thinks that God uses it as a tool in order for him/her to learn a lesson, a lesson for life. The fourth is the compassion model pertaining to the view that as the human being copes with suffering s/he thinks that God shows His compassion to him/her. The fifth is the apathy model which refers

to the conception that as the human being deals with suffering s/he thinks that God is indifferent towards suffering people. The sixth is the substitution model pertaining to the notion that as the human being copes with suffering s/he thinks that it is an occasion for him/her to make a sacrifice for others. The seventh is the accusation model referring to the idea that as the human being copes with suffering he/she thinks that it is an opportunity for him/her to complain against God. The eighth is the lamentation model which relates to the thought that as the human being copes with suffering he/she thinks that it is an occasion for him/her to lament to God. The ninth is the mystical model referring to the notion that as the human being copes with suffering he/she thinks that it is an opportune time to enter into a deeper union with God. I assumed that the nine theoretical spiritual attitudes toward the meaning of suffering are present in the consciousness of Filipino migrants in the Netherlands, which has to be tested empirically.

Table 1 Spiritual Attitudes toward Suffering from a Conceptual Perspective

I.	Retribution (1, 5, 14)
II.	Plan (2, 9, 19)
III.	Didactic (4, 6, 21)
IV.	Compassion (3, 13, 15)
V.	Apathy (8, 10, 18)
VI.	Substitution (11, 12, 17)
VII.	Accusation (22, 24, 26)
VIII.	Lamentation (23, 25, 27)
IX.	Mystical (7, 16, 20)

b. OPERATIONALIZATION

In order to measure the nine theoretical attitudes toward suffering and possibly corroborate their presence in the consciousness of Filipino migrants, it is necessary to concretize them with the help of items.¹¹ Thus, a process of operationalization was undertaken.

11. In order to measure the respondents' attitudes, Likert scales have been constructed. They are mostly a five-point scale which runs from extreme unfavourable-ness, through a neutral middle position to extreme favourable-ness. Many items were also subjected to factor analysis, the criteria of which can be found in the appendix. The reliability of the scales was measured by the coefficient alpha.

To illustrate how the spiritual attitudes toward suffering were operationalized, I presented the nine theoretical spiritual attitudes toward suffering with one item representing each one of them. Looking at Table 1, we can notice that there are Roman numbers and Arabic numbers. The former refer to the theoretical attitudes while the latter refer to the items asked in the questionnaire. The spiritual attitude towards suffering measuring-instrument was comprised of twenty-seven items all in all. I owe my measuring instrument towards suffering to Van der Ven.¹²

The retribution model of suffering was operationalized with the item: *Through suffering God avenges evil*. The plan model of suffering with the item: *Suffering takes place according to God's plan for us*. The didactic model of suffering with the item: *God invites those who suffer to turn suffering into a learning experience*. The compassion model of suffering with the item: *God is full of mercy to those who suffer*. The apathy model of suffering with the item: *Suffering does not touch God at all*. The substitution model of suffering with the item: *God invites us to make of suffering a sacrifice for others*. The accusation model of suffering with the item: *In suffering, one accuses God because s/he lets it happen*. The lamentation model of suffering with the item: *In suffering, one cries for God's help*. The mystical model of suffering was operationalized with the item: *Through suffering we make direct contact with God*.¹³

5. EMPIRICAL-THEOLOGICAL TESTING

In empirical research, empirical testing includes such procedures as: data gathering, preparation of the data set, and empirical data analysis.

I will describe briefly my research instrument and the procedure of the data gathering. I did my research with the help of a questionnaire that has two main parts. The first one refers to the spirituality of the respondents, in terms of their spiritual attitudes toward: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, suffering, and salvation.

12. J. Van der Ven, *Practical Theology*, 183

13. R. Ponce, *Spirituality and Quality of Life: An Empirical-Theological Exploration among Filipino Migrants in the Netherlands*, 115-117.

The second part refers to the quality of life attitudes of the respondents in terms of their attitudes toward the moral conditions in the quality of life, and the attitudes toward the moral values and norms in the quality of life. For the attitudes toward the moral conditions dimension of the quality of life, I made use of the instrument developed by the World Health Organization (WHO 1996). For the attitudes toward the moral dimension (values and norms) of quality of life, Van der Ven, Schilderman and I developed a new instrument.

Additional questions were designed referring to the population characteristics of the respondents. They include socio-demographic characteristics, migration characteristics and spiritual practice characteristics. Socio demographic characteristics include age, sex and the highest level of educational attainment. Migration characteristics include: length of stay in the Netherlands and problems with integration in the Netherlands. Spiritual practice characteristics include: church participation, sacramental practice, prayer practice and salience of religion in the daily life.

The questionnaires were distributed through post/mail in the last week of May 2002. Every respondent was provided with a postage-free-envelope in order for him/her to return the completed questionnaires also by mail. After a month, 130 questionnaires were sent back to me and then I sent a letter of reminder to those who did not yet return the questionnaire. At the end of August 2002, data gathering was ended with a total of 192 questionnaires returned which comes down to 38%. All incoming questionnaires were immediately checked for errors. If more than 30% of the questions were left unanswered by a respondent, it was excluded from the analysis. Of the 192 completed questionnaires, 181 (36%) were finally admitted to statistical analysis, which can be considered a normal response for this type of survey.

By way of illustration from my study, we could now ask the question: Which of the theoretical concepts of the attitudes toward suffering are empirically corroborated? The answer to this question can be found by comparing the theoretical model in Table 1 with the empirical model in Table 2.

In conducting the factor analysis, the items of the two models, namely the substitution model (VI) and the mystical model

(IX), do not appear to satisfy the statistical requirements. For this reason these items had to be removed from the factor analysis. The factor analysis on the items of the seven remaining models resulted into seven factors which exactly corresponded to the remaining theoretical spiritual attitudes we assumed to be present among the Filipino migrant research population. Based on this we can say that our empirical research corroborated our theoretical expectations with regard to these seven remaining attitudes toward suffering.

Table 2 Spiritual Attitudes toward Suffering from an Empirical Perspective

	Mean Score	Standard dev
1. Retribution (I)	3.2	.9
2. Plan (II)	3.3	1.0
3. Didactic (III)	4.0	.8
4. Compassion (IV)	4.1	.7
5. Apathy (V)	2.5	.9
6. Accusation (VII)	2.9	1.0
7. Lamentation (VIII)	4.0	.6

Looking at the mean scores in the third column of table 5.2, we notice that the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands indicate: agreement to three spiritual attitudes (e" 3.40), ambivalence to three spiritual attitudes (e" 2.6, d" 3.4) and disagreement with one spiritual attitude (d" 2.6). Filipino migrants manifest agreement with the spiritual attitudes toward: the compassion model (4.1), the didactic model (4.0) and the lamentation model of suffering (4.0). They manifest ambivalence toward: the retribution model (3.2), the plan model (3.3) and the accusation model (2.9). The empirical spiritual attitude that is rejected is the apathy model (2.5). These data suggest to us that Filipino migrants agree with the notion that: God shares our suffering (compassion model); God gives us strength to become better human beings through suffering (didactic model); and in suffering one supplicates for God's support (lamentation model). The Filipino migrants are ambivalent with regard to the notion that: suffering is a punishment by God (retribution model); in suffering one accuses God because He lets it happen (accusation model); and suffering takes place according to God's plan for us (plan model).

Rejected by the Filipino migrants is the notion that suffering does not touch God at all (apathy model).

Theoretically, it was supposed that human beings on the one hand make an active intervention in suffering through the concept of “substitution theodicy”, and that on the other hand they make a passive action in suffering through the concept of “mystical theodicy”. Or, to put it in another way, the empirical results show that the only type of interventions attributable to the human being in terms of suffering is the “interactive intervention” which includes “accusation theodicy” and “lamentation theodicy”. But the theoretical supposition that human beings make an active intervention and passive intervention is not empirically corroborated as far as the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands are concerned. Looking at the empirical model in table 2 we could see that the “substitution model of suffering” and “mystical model of suffering” disappear.¹⁴ This could be interpreted in the sense that these two spiritual attitudes toward suffering do not actually belong to ordinary people’s vocabulary. Perhaps, they are elite attitudes toward the meaning of suffering but they are not present among the less spiritually gifted people.

SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE ATTITUDES TOWARD SUFFERING

After having given the picture of the empirical model of theodicy held by the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands, it is now time to consider their social location.

In terms of the social location of the spiritual attitudes toward suffering, the population characteristics that have shown the most number of relevant associations are: age, education, length of stay in the Netherlands and salience of religion. In relation to education, the higher the level of education, the higher the preference for spiritual attitudes toward the lamentation model of suffering. In relation to the length of stay in the Netherlands, the longer the respondents have stayed in the Netherlands the stronger the rejection of the spiritual attitudes toward the retribution model and the accusation model of

14. Items belonging to substitution and mystical model of suffering could not satisfy the valid statistical requirement. Their factor loadings and communality of variance were below .40, thus, they were excluded from the analysis.

suffering. In relation to the salience of religion in daily life, a conclusion can be drawn that the more religion becomes salient in the daily life of the Filipino migrants, the higher the preference for the retribution model, the plan model, the didactic model and the compassion model of suffering.

6. THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

The last phase in the empirical-theological cycle method is called “theological evaluation”. This comprises three sub-phases: theological interpretation, theological reflection and theological-methodological reflection. At the first level is the theological interpretation. This is due to the fact that the numerical results obtained in the preceding analytical phase do not in themselves provide an answer to the theological question. Rather, the results need to be interpreted. At the second level is the theological reflection. It is based on the results of the theological interpretation. It is a reflection on the meaning and relevance of the results of the theological interpretation and the adequacy of the structure and execution of the empirical-theological study that have yielded the results. At the third level is the theological-methodological reflection. This is a reflection about the whole methodological process as a whole. A reflection on how theology is successful in appropriating the empirical methods of other disciplines.

Giving flesh to this final stage of the empirical-theological cycle method, I cite the findings of my research regarding the relationship between spirituality and quality of life among the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands. There are two things which I would like to focus on regarding the relationship between spirituality and quality of life. The first one refers to the question whether spiritual attitudes and quality of life attitudes show positive, negative or zero relationships. Looking at table 3, the study shows that the relationship can only be seen between spiritual attitudes and the moral values and norms dimension of quality of life but none with the moral condition dimension. What is the meaning of this empirical outcome? That the correlation analyses I conducted did not appear to lead to any relevant correlation coefficient between the theme-related spiritual attitudes and the moral conditions attitudes means that both domains are independent from each other. In other words, for the spiritual

attitudes the domain of the moral conditions of the quality of life is a neutral, irrelevant territory that has no spiritual resonance whatsoever. The same should be said in regard to the spiritual attitudes toward God and toward suffering on the one hand and the moral values and norms attitudes on the other. In contrast with that, the spiritual attitudes toward Jesus, the Holy Spirit and salvation, do appear to have a spiritual saliency for the domain of the quality of life values and norms. The general remark that can be made based on this research is that spiritual attitudes can be considered as necessary conditions in developing one's moral values and norms. That one's belief in Jesus, the Holy Spirit and suffering can inspire people to nurture the values of self-esteem, solicitude, justice and the moral norms of autonomy, respect and human rights.

Table 3. Empirical Outcome of the Relationships between Spiritual Attitudes and Quality of Life Attitudes with Varying Degrees of Spiritual Practi

Attitudes towards	General population		Population with low spiritual practice		Population with moderate spiritual practice		Population with high spiritual practice	
	Moral conditions	Values and norms	Moral conditions	Values and norms	Moral conditions	Values and norms	Moral conditions	Values and norms
GOD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+
Jesus	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	+
Holy Spirit	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	+
Suffering	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+
Salvation	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	+

However, spiritual attitudes have a neutral role in connection with the attitudes toward the moral conditions dimension of the quality of life as indicated by the absence of any relationship between the two. The zero relationship between spiritual attitudes and the moral condition attitudes is quite intriguing in the sense that it suggests that spiritual attitudes have nothing to do with the person's experience of physical health, psychological health, social relationships and environmental conditions.

The second topic refers to the question whether the relationship between spiritual attitudes and quality of life attitudes changes when varying degrees of spiritual practice are taken into account. The empirical outcome shows that when the degree of

participation in spiritual practice increases, the positive relationships between the moral values and norms attitudes and spiritual attitudes also increase.

On the bases of my research findings, my general recommendation is a research that deals with the extent of influence of secularization on the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands. Related to this future research, the questions that might be asked are: How far do Filipinos in the Netherlands connect or segregate spiritual attitudes from their day-to-day life? Do they attribute their physical, environmental, relational and psychological quality of life more to themselves and to the State that facilitates their experiences of quality of life than to their faith in God and other spiritual resources?¹⁵

D. INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THEOLOGY

Based on my presentation of the empirical-theological cycle method as popularized by the Department of Empirical Theology at the Radboud University Nijmegen and based on my illustration culled from my own research project with the Filipino migrants in the Netherlands, the practice of interdisciplinarity in theology can be found on the following points.

1. The Department of Empirical Theology at the Radboud University Nijmegen started from collaborative efforts with other faculty of social sciences like Sociology of Religion and the Psychology of Religion with the intention of developing a multidisciplinary concept for training and research in pastoral theology.

2. The Intra-disciplinary approach of the Department of Empirical Theology in Nijmegen clearly indicates its openness to the methodology of other (non-theological) sciences in their practice of theology. Beginning in 1975, theologians at the Radboud University Nijmegen began applying the methodology of empirical research to the field of pastoral theology, in order to describe, analyse and explain pastoral and ecclesiastical problems from their own particular theological point of view. Pastoral-empirical theologians now utilize the tools and techniques of the empirical sciences in order to gain a

15. R. Ponce, *Spirituality and Quality of Life*, 222-228.

better understanding of the theological questions of particular interest to them and solve their own theological problems.

3. In the five phases of the empirical-theological cycle method of Van der Ven, the practice of interdisciplinarity is very evident. In the development of theological problems and goals, theological themes are paired or being challenged whether they have correlated or not correlated with non-theological themes, e.g., religious attitudes and ethno-centricism, religion and human rights, spirituality and quality of life which in a sense are interdisciplinary. In the theological induction phase, on the one hand, the elaboration of theological themes are enriched through appeal to Scriptures, writings of the Church fathers, theologians and from the official pronouncement of the Church Magisterium. In this case, it seeks insights from systematic theologians, moral theologians, exegetes, liberation theologians, experts in spirituality, etc. On the other hand, the elaboration of non-theological themes is enriched through the aid of philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and others. In the theological deduction and the empirical-theological testing stage, it adapts the methodology of social sciences like sociology, anthropology and psychology in developing *theological attitudes instruments, data gathering and treatment of the data gathered*. In the theological evaluation phase, it seeks insights from the social sciences in order to explain the empirical findings of theological research.

E. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the interdisciplinary model as an account of reading the relevance of theology in the present time and the model used in the paper presented, some insights and recommendation can be considered:

1. The experience of the Department of Empirical Theology at the Radboud University Nijmegen tells us that being open to other non-theological social sciences is an enriching experience. It gives insights whether the discussions among theologians in the academe corroborate in the minds of the people in the present generation. The practice of interdisciplinarity in theology gives empirical insights on what is the role of theology, religion and spirituality on some important aspects of people's lives like human rights, quality

of life, etc. One contribution of empirical theology is the attempt to corroborate some important theological themes in the minds of the people through the aid of modern scientific tools of analysis like statistics. Based on my experience, exact sciences like statistics, can be an “ancilla” to give insights whether theological themes and non-theological themes corroborate in the minds of the people.

2. Seeking the aid of non-theological fields of knowledge is a painstaking and a laborious task yet a satisfying exercise. I recommend that other theologians will have the patience of learning the insights, methodologies and tools of analysis of other social sciences and apply them in the field of theology. At the moment, Fr. Dave Capucan, a diocesan priest from the Prelature of Infanta, Quezon is also doing a Ph D in Empirical Theology at the Radboud University Nijmegen. The main theme of his study is the relationship between religion and ethnocentrism. Employing the same method of empirical-theological research, the department of Empirical Theology, Radboud University Nijmegen in partnership with the Institute of Spirituality in Asia (ISA, Inc) conducts a study among the Muslim and Christian youth in Mindanao. This is part of a cross-cultural study which seeks to find out the effects of religious attitudes and behaviour on human rights attitudes.

What binds Filipino theologians together is the search for a relevant and meaningful theology that is responsive to the needs of our times. In my view, the empirical-theological cycle/method of doing theology can be a potential contribution to this endeavour.

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