

FR. BARTHOLOMEW MARIA XIBERTA: PHILOSOPHER*

XIBERTA: THE MAN, THE CARMELITE, THE SCHOLAR

Fr. Bartholomew Maria Xiberta (1897-1967) had as great an influence on the direction of the Carmelite Family in the mid 20th century as anyone. He helped form generations of Carmelite students as professor of theology at St. Albert's International College in Rome. As one who did not believe in holidays, immediately after his last class whenever there was a holiday break in the scholastic schedule, he left immediately to visitate nuns and sisters, who are still grateful for the solid spiritual nourishment he provided for them. As a perennial member of the General Curia, he was highly esteemed as counsellor by various Priors General under whom he served. His knowledge of and love for things Carmelite made him an invaluable and incisive advisor. Although notorious for downplaying the differences in the various schools of spirituality (when asked some question about Carmelite spirituality, he would brush aside the query with a typical gesture and trace a direct line straight upward towards heaven much in the line

* Il compianto P. Redento Valabek mi consegnò personalmente questo suo scritto prima di partire per gli Stati Uniti, dove avrebbe concluso la sua vicenda terrena per un incidente stradale. Con questo scritto egli intendeva rendere omaggio al P. Xiberta, giustamente ritenuto da lui uno degli interpreti più prestigiosi del carisma carmelitano nel ventesimo secolo. Si tratta quindi di una testimonianza preziosa, dove è possibile cogliere la congenialità spirituale e intellettuale tra due spiriti illustri che in modo diverso, ma con eguale dedizione, hanno dimostrato tutto il loro amore per l'ordine d'appartenenza. Si consenta di ricordare, qui, un significativo episodio della vita di P. Redento, che egli amava raccontare quasi divertito, ma con evidente visibile commozione. Ancora in periodo di oppressione comunista egli volle recarsi nella sua patria d'origine, la Cecoslovacchia. Volendo incontrarsi, ovviamente, con i pochi superstiti carmelitani, andò al loro convento di Praga e bussò alla porta. Ma i religiosi vivevano nella paura di "spie" del regime e quindi si guardarono bene dall'aprire la porta ad uno "sconosciuto". Allora, per farsi riconoscere, padre Redento ebbe la felice idea di mettersi a cantare, nelle inconfondibili note gregoriane che soltanto un carmelitano poteva conoscere, il "Flos Carmeli": e la porta si aprì. Proprio nel "Flos Carmeli" e nella pietà mariana che questo canto esprime può vedersi il valore, il segno d'identità di Redento Valabek [nota dell'editor].

of St. John of the Cross's ascent of Mt. Carmel, with the comment "spirituality goes straight to the Lord". Even those who did not share all of his views were impressed by the authenticity and commitment of his life.

Fr. Xiberta was a theologian by profession; in fact he was esteemed among his peers as a profound thinker. I recall at my oral exam for my licentiate in Theology at the Pontifical Lateran University, the professor, later Dean, Vladimir Boublik, asked who had taught me and when I answered that it had been Fr. Xiberta, his comment was: "a theologian's theologian". As was usual in those pre-Vatican II times, an integral part of Xiberta's theological arsenal was an underlying philosophy. In fact, Fr. Xiberta repeatedly insisted – and more so as the years rolled by – that the philosophical premises of our faith are vital in order to preserve the integrity and orthodoxy of the Christian faith. Up to now there has been no attempt to study the philosophical thought of Fr. Xiberta in any synthetic and relatively complete way.

It is a great boon for Carmel that a professor in Venezuela, Pompeo Ramis, has published an *Ideario filosófico de Bartolomé Xiberta* (Consejo de Desarrollo Científico, Humanístico y Tecnológico de la Universidad de los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela, 1996), in which he provides a first such synthesis. One's trust in the author's study is strengthened by the number of times he admits that he cannot pretend to give a complete overview of the philosophical premises of Fr. Xiberta's thought. In the first place, being a theologian, Fr. Xiberta was interested in philosophy – seriously interested – insofar as it served the theologian's purposes. Generally this implied a piece-meal approach to philosophical questions. I say "piece-meal" because in fact Fr. Xiberta, as a member of the prestigious Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome, generally taught two courses – one on ontology, and the other on gnoseology – at St. Albert's in Rome as optional courses for those interested in earning a diploma from the appropriate Academy. Many of his students, who later became professors of theology availed themselves of these courses which more often than not repeated what had been learned in the students' regular philosophy curriculum. As we shall see later, there were some typically Xibertian truths which he particularly stressed.

Pompeo Ramis' advantage lies in that, as a fellow Catalan, he had easy access to Fr. Xiberta during his latter years of doctoral study in philosophy at the Pontifical University Gregoriana. Fr. Xiberta, ever the meticulous religious, would "recreate" for the prescribed half-hour periods-day by walking up and down the long corridors at St. Alberto's.

Ramis would often join Xiberta, and would engage him in a conversation especially about philosophical questions. Xiberta always took people seriously; even the novice in theological studies would he listen to (often he was anxious to give the answer, while the neophyte was still trying to put his objection or difficulty into words). All the more, then, was he delighted that some young Carmelite was embarking on the study of theology or philosophy.

Fr. Xiberta had a good sense of humor, but not on philosophical or theological questions. On these latter, he was too personally involved; he was *au courant* of the complexities and various opinions about every question in his field. Having had the advantage of a deep study of the medieval scholastics, he had come to a mature synthesis of the best of scholastic/ecclesial thought. Thus, when Ramis (and others) would begin to show the merits of some theory or teaching that they had just studied about in one of the Roman universities, but which deviated from Xiberta's vision, he could become quite agitated, tugging on the front of the fellow Carmelite's capuche, and rasping "*senti, senti* – listen, listen" as he was determined to cut at its roots what for him was an obvious error. Many times the discussion grew so animated that in the end Fr. Xiberta begged off, professing that he would never be able to get to sleep, as obviously these questions were not just pleasant exchanges of opinion, but rather in defence of the Catholic faith from so many critics. The author, Ramis, has professed how much these discussions aided him in his own philosophical studies. This first-hand experience of knowing Xiberta's mind on various questions adds much to the value of his work. The respect which Ramis shows for Xiberta and Xiberta's thought is ample proof that his fiery discussion with his fellow Catalan was a sincere attempt to reach the truth. Even when the author demurs from some conclusion of Xiberta, it is with admirable respect, which could be a paradigm of what respectful dissent should be like.

As a theologian immersed in the traditional scholastic authors, whose worth he appreciated in the measure that he deepened his knowledge of their thought, Fr. Xiberta will not be an *avant garde* or faddist theologian or philosopher. He definitely fits into the category of those who see philosophy as the handmaid of theology. On other hand, he decried, and with insistence, a mere repetition of what has already been said or even taught magisterially. If one repeated what had been written, it must be something internalized, that has now become part of one's own proper vision and conviction. He anticipated Pope John XXIII's admonition that a distinction must be made between the realities of our faith and the way in which we express

them. Xiberta's attachment to the realities themselves – to the Bl. Trinity and all things that belong to God's sphere – was rock solid; but he realized that the way to express these realities is always subject to being said better. Of course, this did not give him permission to say any which thing; the expressions of our faith are frightfully important because they are the way in which we come to know the invisible, yet all important realities. Wrong expressions will lead to erroneous ways of knowing the realities. This is why Xiberta was frightfully concerned with the correct expression – and did not hesitate to condemn wrong, doubtful or too vague or ambiguous statements of the truth.

Fr. Xiberta was something of a prodigy already at the age of two. It seems that because of lack of maternal interest, the youngster, baptized Baldiri, spent most of his time with the local parish priest. At three years of age, he was already responding in Latin to the priest as he served Mass. These early experiences obviously marked him for life: the Eucharist and the Blessed Mother were to be the two "real things" in his life. For him Christ and Mary were not dogmas, but the most important Persons of his life, who loved him like no one else.

Fr. Xiberta was indefatigable; he reminds one of Bl. Titus Brandsma, a workaholic. Confreres who knew him close up are unanimous in their assessment: he would not lose a single moment. Even when one of us students went to this room to ask for some help in our studies or in preparing our theses, he would give us his undivided attention, but when finished, by the time we reached the door, he would be back working at his typewriter. What amazed all of us was the prodigious output even in fields other than his beloved theology. His love for the liturgy and for the Carmelite Rite for which he fought against all comers, he dedicated hours and hours to prepare the Carmelite Rite liturgical books. He meticulously proof-read the 1938 four-volume Breviary, which resulted in a minimum of errors; in fact, he used to proof-read while walking on the streets of Rome; once at a crossing he was run down by an auto. He got up, apologized to the driver and limped back home.

The notes which he prepared for us students for his classes – complete to the last comma, he himself typed on to the stencil, to be run off on the Gestetner copy machine. When younger, he played soccer – with all his might. He learned to play the violin and when there was no one else, he even directed the choir. The list of his writings runs on and on; he wrote for local parish bulletins and for the most serious of scientific magazines. The latter were "natural" level, as he laughingly told us that rarely did the editor of a popular review ask him for a second article. His style was "too theological". The many

letters he wrote – meticulously and thoughtfully – especially to nuns and sisters have been handed down as relics by their recipients. He was not one for television; in fact, he made it a point to congratulate us students on various plays and skits we put on for various celebrations during the school year. He would invariably sit in the front row (he had been sitting with Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac that morning, serving on the preparatory commission for the II Vatican Council), and laughing without restraint at our antics. Afterwards he was still laughing and congratulating: “Now that’s what I call a real recreation!”

This same assiduity was mirrored in his lectures. He rarely digressed; if he did so he immediately explained why so, and was soon back to his logically and systematically prepared lectures. His aim was to present to us students the teaching of the Catholic Church clearly, directly, not using interventions of other authors nor even the words of magisterial teaching. These he did give subsequently, but the core of his teaching was something he had long and deeply thought out in a way that was eminently personal and still faithful to the Church’s substantial traditions which he strove to share with this students. Fr. Xiberta definitely was not flashy; he was much more concerned about the correct expression of the truth than coining a catchy phrase. He explained to his students that for him pedagogy meant wholesome, comprehensive exposition of the material at hand. He was rigorously interested in substance, not in a happy turn of phrase. This approach to pedagogy carried over into his talks. My own class invited Fr. Xiberta to give us the retreat preceeding our priestly ordination (1960). Although up-to-his-eyes in work, including preparations for the II Vatican Council, he readily acquiesced. His talks flowed from his theology; for someone who had written so extensively, his talks were notoriously short. He was not long into this talk when he came to his main point (e.gr. “if we are loved by the heavenly Father, it is because He sees the Son in us”). He elaborated on this and then finished.

As happens to most of us, in his early years he was available to be a guide for visitors to Rome, something he was not able to continue in his later years, but his interest in others did not wane. He particularly followed the progress of the Carmelite Order with almost child-like eagerness. In reality it was merely an extension of his love for Jesus and Mary. And because of this love, his tendency was to become attached to doctrinal propositions – so that he could safely communicate the truth about the most important realities of our existence to others.

Fr. Xiberta confessed that the happiest days of his life he spent “on vacation” in the monasteries of our cloistered nuns, to whom he

gave spiritual talks, which again were based on his dogmatic teaching. The two-week break for Christmas and Easter, he would spend in Italian monasteries. After his last class before the break, he did not bother going to his room; he ran to the dining room, stuffed two day-old rolls into his habit pocket, took his prepared satchel and literally ran to catch the first bus to the first monastery he was to visit. The nuns have never forgotten how engrossed he became in the liturgical celebrations. The way in which he celebrated the Liturgy was even better than his sermon. He was not above singing the long Passion-Gospel on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, taking all three parts by himself. He solemnized the Sacred Triduum in the Carmelite Rite, asking that as much of the Office be sung as possible. He told me that the very best July 16th celebration for him was the one when he and Fr. Augustin Forcadell made up the local community; the two of them sang every note of the long Office and solemn Mass and then spent the rest of the day preaching to the people and enrolling them in the scapular.

Like every human being Fr. Xiberta had his limitations. He was not averse to confessing them. He admitted that he was not good at all assessing candidates for the priesthood or the Carmelite life; he was too much in love with Jesus, Mary and Carmel to realize that others had not reached his totalitarian commitment. I recall one candidate to whom I preached the retreat before solemn vows. When he showed some doubts, I told him to confer with his confessor, who happened to be Fr. Xiberta. The latter assured him that he should take vows. The obedient, humble young man did so, but in a few weeks was asking for (and obtaining) a dispensation from his vows. For a while Fr. Xiberta was Apostolic Examiner of the Roman clergy at the Vicariate. As he was examining one student about to be ordained a priest, Fr. Xiberta in conscience could not pass him because of the mistake in doctrine that he was expressing. The youngster began weeping, and so did Fr. Xiberta. Soon afterwards Fr. Xiberta resigned from the position.

Fr. Xiberta was also limited in his appreciation of reality around him. Some things he just seemed to block off. Once I remember him telling a group of us that there were three Johns whom he could never understand – St. John Chrysostom, Jean Gerson and St. John of the Cross. While objectively, he probably understood more than all of us put together, still he readily admitted some blind spots. The three Johns may have reflected three areas with which Fr. Xiberta was not synchronized – rhetoric, humanism, mysticism. Another limitation was his iron-clad attachment to some traditions which demanded adaptation in conformity with the times. Mischievously, we students

would ask Fr. Xiberta, who attended the sessions of the II Vatican Council, how many heresies he had heard in the Council hall that day. One who kept sacred the secrecy to which the Council members were sworn, Fr. Xiberta had no answer, but from his impassioned teaching in class, we understood that some things he held to be sacred were being questioned. Sometimes, however, he remained attached to secondary issues, as for instance, the Carmelite claim on early saints such as St. Dionysius Pope, or Pope St. Telesphorus, St. Hilarion, St. Euphrosyna and their retention on the Carmelite Calendar. Another example would be his attempt to show the beginnings of the scapular devotion at the beginnings of the Order, when historians have amply shown that this Church blessed and approved devotion came later on in Carmel's history.

Humble and simple, Fr. Xiberta was limited in his appreciation of and obligation to maintain his personal health. Engrossed in the life of the Spirit and in his theological and philosophical studies, he paid too little attention to his physical needs. He went to a doctor only when absolutely indispensable and when superiors demanded it of him. I recall one morning as he came to class he looked particularly in pain. I asked him if he were not feeling well. He said he had not slept all night because of a toothache. When I asked whether he had used some remedy, his answer was: "Of course; I put some toothpaste on it". This impractical side of Fr. Xiberta may appear absurd to a modern generation, but he was following the tradition of this time which saw suffering and pain which had not been sought, as something permitted by God, and so to be accepted as our share in the redemptive work of Christ.

With regard to philosophy, Fr. Xiberta often complained that moderns are more concerned with the methodology than with the contents of philosophy. In fact, he also lamented that students often thought they would become proficient by reading much rather than in depth. He recommended reading less, but integrating, interiorizing and assimilating more. Until the end, Fr. Xiberta contended that thinking should not be submitted to a methodology, but on the contrary, the method should submit to the thinking process. Fr. Xiberta's first introduction to philosophical methodology had come from a fellow Catalan Carmelite, Fr. Llovera, who eventually became Vicar General of the Order, then left the Order and became a Canon at the Cathedral; he was basically a sociologist, and his book on the subject was the standard text on sociology in his native Catalonia for many years.

Fr. Xiberta agreed with the school of Husserl that philosophy's aim is to arrive at reality as it is in itself; it is not some super-imposed

structure that we construct on it. He denounced the English Sensist teaching typified by Locke, which accepted the Stoic assumption that all knowledge came exclusively through the senses. While with the Scholastics Xiberta affirmed that our knowledge begins in the senses, he repeatedly taught that it does not end there. The Sensist teaching gives an incomplete version of reality. If there was one thing Xiberta insisted on, it was completeness of teaching. It was probably for this reason that Xiberta purposefully avoided novelty, the fads of the day which meant to attract youth by means of easier, more attractive expressions.

Xiberta's methodology cannot do without an introduction. In the introductory part, Xiberta aims to arrive at the *quiddative* dimension of the object of study. What he means is that in study, one must begin with the very essence of a subject or object in its various dimensions: 1) *subjecti indoles*: the dimension of the subject to be studied; 2) *investigationis media*: sources and method; 3) *investigationis structura*: the plan to be followed in study.

For Xiberta, the *Status quaestionis* (how the question is being broached at the present moment) is not an easy way of entering into the matter, because an overly limited idea of the issue results in false solutions to the problem. How often the context of an argument can throw a whole new light on the matter. Xiberta faithfully gives the various opinions or approaches to the subject, often dividing and subdividing them into various categories, again to give as ample a picture of thinking on the matter at hand as possible. He was especially strong in medieval thought and esteemed and quoted by such renowned experts as Gison, De Wulf and Grabmann.

A strong point of Xiberta was his ability to synthesize. He could encapsulate the thought of an author in a few sentences with uncanny accuracy. His own thought would have to be labelled Thomistic; however, not as a simple repetition, but as a critical interpretation. Xiberta knew how to set each of St. Thomas' arguments in historical perspective. He recognized St. Thomas to have been at odds with many contemporaries of him because of his espousal of Aristotle; Xiberta inherited Aquinas' quest for truth regardless of its provenance. But on the contrary he was adamantly opposed to those schools of thought which threw out elements of the truth.

Xiberta was never impressed by improvised commentaries on various texts. Rather he opted for a conscientious, logical exposé of the whole teaching on a subject. In this he is definitely in the maximalist tradition. He avoids saying as little as possible about questions. He often decried the poverty of the tracts of the One and Triune God.

He could not understand how we could say so little about Him who is the Creator and the *raison-d'être* of all else. He purposely elaborated the two tracts – on the One and on the Triune God – with their many dimensions because, as he said, the more you love someone, the more you want to know about him and to share that knowledge with others. He asked: is there any greater gift that we priests and religious can share with others than knowledge about God? Xiberta was never content, as were some of his contemporaries, with a compendium of current controversies, but inevitably aimed to arrive at those *quiddative* propositions that tell us about the very essence of Him in whom we live and exist and act.

In all this Fr. Xiberta had no concern about style. He worked very diligently to share a correct (rather than a beautiful) expression of the truth. In his teaching, he gave the truth in his carefully phrased *Conspectus doctrinae*: an overview of the teaching. We his students were impressed that with each successive edition of his notes he would inevitably change a word, a phrase or even the whole *Conspectus*, which was precisely the *quidditas*, the substantial statement of the correct teaching.

Xiberta was a firm believer in Latin; being a language not in common use, he considered it an apt vehicle to express essential truths of our faith which do not change with the passage of time. We noted how he favoured certain Latin expressions, all the more so if he found them in the Carmelite liturgical texts, or in the Order's saints and writers. Even in the most abstruse philosophical/theological argumentation in class, he did not hesitate to cite some Carmelite who put well what he was trying to say. When someone noted that he could be accused of chauvinism he replied at once: "We cite other authors to get our point across; why should we neglect our own?" His Latin followed the rules, but fortunately at St. Albert's he had two Latinists who went over his notes. First Fr. Alberto Grammatico, a great humanist with whom Xiberta would spend many a recreation discussing articles from *Reader's Digest* so that the both of them could broaden their horizons beyond their theological horizons. Fr. Grammatico, who taught in some of Rome's prestigious lyceums, was an accomplished Latin orator; he polished the style of Xiberta's Latin. After Fr. Grammatico's death, Fr. Macarius van Wanroij reviewed Xiberta's Latin texts. Fr. Macarius was much more meticulous and prone to follow the rules than the flow, as had Grammatico.

In fact, many students noted that they understood Xiberta's teaching much better when he spoke than when he wrote. My own hand-out notes ("*dispense*") are filled with marginal notations with

clarifications and examples that Xiberta used, avoiding a mere reading of his very precise notes. Often he connected his teaching with some current event (especially of the Church's life), or with something he had already taught previously, or showed the relevance of the truth for the spiritual life. In fact, all of his teaching had something of this "sapiential" flavor; at the beginning of each school year he would comment: "Unless your theology ends up in Chapel, it's worth very little".

Among the students at Sant'Alberto there were those more academically inclined and these garnered much from Xiberta's classes. Those of a more pastoral or practical bent often did not appreciate the lectures, although no one doubted the authenticity of the man, the scholar, the religious. It was obvious to all that he saw it his duty to communicate teaching about really existing objects of our faith and not only impressions or feelings, and this even when he delved into the question of mystical theology (which he did, for example, in dealing with the question of what worth is our earthly knowledge about God). As will be evident in what follows he was viscerally opposed to most modern philosophy, especially of the Kantian school – and this more when speaking than when writing. In a dialogue with Xiberta, the mention of Kant seemed to be a red mantle waved before a bull.

XIBERTA'S GNOSEOLOGY

In his defence of the objectivity of the faith, Xiberta understood the serious threats posed by those who doubted or denied the validity of the human thinking process. Though he tirelessly confronted and attempted to refute theories which warped the human thinking process, he still invariably took the theories very seriously and his refutations used – especially orally – some strong adjectives. Those close to Xiberta noted how passionate a nature he had; with him the Lord's injunction "let your speech be 'yes, yes, no, no' as everything else comes from the Evil one", resonated well in Xiberta's vision. Just as on the political scene the deeply Catalan soul of Xiberta saw no good in Generalissimo Francisco Franco, so on the philosophical scene, he definitely identified some thinkers as being in the "enemy camp". Descartes was one of these. Time and again, Xiberta repeated that Descartes posed the problem of knowledge badly. Xiberta was deeply convinced, in his "common sense" approach, that the approach of the Aristotelean/Thomistic school was the correct one. On every possible occasion he would show the validity of the latter, and insisted that

this theory was able to resist the criticism of the English Empiricists, of the Kantian critique of pure reason and of many contemporary irrational schools of thought.

Xiberta's Aristotelean Thomism was typically his: he abhorred mere repetition. He was convinced that if the truth of the Thomistic school were valid, then it should be assimilated personally and expressed in a personal way. For Xiberta allegiance to a philosophical system (as to a school of spirituality) was definitely not a mere repetition, but rather the basic orientation of the thinking process of a person. Acutely, he points out that the basic gnoseological problem can be traced further back than to Descartes; its origins lie in the Nominalism of Ockham which claimed a bottomless abyss between the object known and what we say about it.

Xiberta has no doubt that the human intellect is an imperfect faculty, but time and again he stresses that imperfect is not equivalent to erroneous, at least not in its roots. Xiberta is not lavish with examples, at least not in his written works (when talking to students, answering their queries, he was much more prone to use images). However in this case he gave the example of a watch which does not tell the correct time. The watch is deficient not because it cannot tabulate time correctly in itself (= "*quidditatively*"), but for other reasons, perhaps because the watch was made badly, used badly, or maintained badly.

Until he died, Xiberta held that the way the critique of human reason was posed in modern philosophy was a step backwards. It is obvious, he would say, that the human mind makes mistakes. But rather than postulating a substantially flawed mind, Xiberta pointed out that the intellect does make mistakes *per accidens* when it frames its discourse based on false premises. He asks the pointed question: why, when one's theory does not correspond to reality as understood, why always say that the theory is right and something is wrong with the reality as understood by the mind?

A penetrating thinker himself, Xiberta decried a dichotomy between pre-scientific and scientific knowledge. Since our knowing faculty is created, as we are, it is imperfect, and so limited, and so it need not always be onehundred percent correct. But this in no way implies that it is a failure. Though imperfect and limited, it still can function validly. Certainly, on a given matter, specialists will know more than someone with a general knowledge of the matter at hand. This fact does not justify a critique of our reason at its roots, but should elicit an admission of our creaturely limitations.

Most of our knowledge is about contingent things, and so demands a certainty that corresponds to physical and moral objects. It should not automatically be defined as unscientific, but rather it will be determined by the quality of the object. In moral matters, “certainty” has to take into account the whole ambit of free will and the free activity of the human person. The uncertainty that does exist is based not on the knowing faculty, but rather on the freedom of the human being.

Reacting to many other philosophers, Xiberta repeated: our knowledge is not a problem to be resolved, but simply a fact to be explained. He does not apologize for the reason for his adamant position: in his *Introductio in Sacram Theologiam* (p. 31), he explicitly states that his intention is to provide a solid basis for an objective theology in alerting his students to the infiltrations of subjectivism and anti-intellectualism of certain theologies.

The process of human knowledge is based on two terms, the knower and the object known. Both remain themselves while the knower receives knowledge from the object. This is the basis for the *objectivity* of human knowledge. It takes nothing away from either of the terms. As a process, human knowledge affects not the object, but the subject. The object is in no way conditioned by our knowledge of it. It exists on its own before, during and after our knowledge of it. And this is the greatest guarantee of authenticity.

Doubtlessly, there is a subjective side of knowledge. The knower receives information about the known object in accord with the knower’s limitations and imperfections. However, Xiberta warns against a common acceptance of “conceptualizations”: it is not that our concepts/ideas cause or shape the object, but vice versa. In other words, it should not be taken as our projection on to reality outside our minds, but rather that we have converted the objective reality into a concept, as expressed in a statement.

“Experience” is something basically passive, as we receive data from outside objects. Sometimes common experience can be more accurate than a more sophisticated kind because it is free of ideologies and pre-judgements. Theoretically scientific experience should be more accurate, correcting the deficiencies of the more common kind.

While “ideas” are imperfect and can never substitute for the objects themselves as experienced, still two philosophical extreme positions about ideas must be avoided, and Xiberta never tired of combatting the Sensist position that would make ideas only a shadowy image of reality, but he was equally opposed to the Idealist school which made them out to be clearer than the reality itself.

In fact, experience should end up in knowledge and not just in a catalogue of contingent facts, but rather in data that say something about the substance of the known reality. In some cases these can be dynamic, accidental aspects that reveal the essence. Theologian that he was, Xiberta could not get away from an example from theology: knowledge of the death of Jesus. It is true knowledge if it refers to the veracity of his death, to the saving power of his death, but not if it refers merely to his death as an historical, contingent fact.

Another favorite factor in Xiberta's insistence on the objectivity of human knowledge was based on the natural, spontaneous way in which we make statements using a subject and predicate. On numerous occasions he refers to this as our spontaneous way of perceiving reality. The subject, objectively speaking, is the reality as it stands before the mind in its totality, indivisibility and uniqueness. The predicate is some part of the substantiality of the subject. Xiberta's insistence is that both are real. Predicates help us in building up our knowledge; subjects, for their part, are indivisible and totally different among themselves. Each one excludes others in composition and in dynamism.

Xiberta sees the subject and predicate fact as something deeply rooted in the very being of all reality and certainly not something that our mind invents. He underscored in season and out of season that our mind does not superimpose these categories on reality, but the mind finds reality such and reports what it finds: the mind *intuits* the characteristic notes/predicates that fit each subject.

Truth, then, is not just in sensitive apprehension, by audio-visual means (and how much this would need to be stressed in today's society), but rather is a composition of the mind. Sensitive apprehension is the beginning of the process with a need for the "power of abstraction" of the mind. Otherwise, only physical objects perceptible to the senses could be objects of scientific knowledge.

The limitations of knowledge and sometimes the insuperable obstacles which afflict our understanding of truth should be attributed to the inevitable imperfection of every created activity, but not to the normal structure of our knowing process. Thus Xiberta cannot but write against the Relativists, the Subjectivists, the Positivists, as he demands the most perfect objectivity possible. He is not alone: he joins ranks with natural scientists as well as physicists who base all their theories on "an external world independent of the perceiving subject" (Albert Einstein).

Xiberta considers it unworthy of a creditable philosopher to be content with first appearances, as Locke does. The natural sciences

would be emptied of their validity, if because of first appearances, lead was identified simply as uranium bereft of radioactive energy.

Although in his lectures he often did not have time to go deeply into the question, Xiberta underscored the cooperation of the will in the human knowing process. First, we see, we perceive, we apprehend by means of intellectual activity; then we adhere, we consent to our knowledge by means of our will. Consent to a proposition without sufficient reason is labelled superficiality. Not to cede when faced with serious problems is deemed hardness of heart. A judicious person will demand proportionately serious reasons. Not to perceive the truth that has been adequately proposed is a sign of mental laziness or of mental alowness. It is the whole person who adheres to something – and this leads to the moral field. In itself, the intellect is amoral; honesty depends directly on consent or lack thereof.

XIBERTA'S ONTOLOGY

One of Xiberta's deepest frustrations was the lack of seriousness among modern thinkers about the ontological/metaphysical question. Conversely, he admires those who do so: Suarez, Rosmini, Raeymaker, he appreciated. It must be said that this question was of vital interest to Xiberta the theologian and his *objective* vision of a really existing God. However, he was also objective enough to acknowledge the question as an autonomous area of interest.

How often Xiberta lamented that the notion of "being" was taken as passive. Typically, he passionately held just the opposite: "being" is the most dynamic reality because it denotes all that simply is not. And he goes back to sense knowledge to point out that our senses provide us with the contrast between existing and non-existing realities. We simply experience on an objective level the fact that things that are not, do come into being. It is common experience that positive realities, good in themselves, are limited and imply the absence of others; for instance sound is not color, black is not white... With his typically keen mind, Xiberta agrees with those thinkers who see a subtle distinction between "to be" and "being", although he hastens to add that for the most part they coincide in meaning.

When dealing with elements like genus, species, properties and accidents..., he notes that they are not concrete being, but rather *entities* insofar as they do not exist except by subsisting in another. They are imperfect entities, but surely they are not nothing; e. gr. the color

red does not exist on its own, but only as property of an object, but it is certainly something real.

For Xibereta “being” is more fundamental than the more modern term “phenomenon”. “Being” is a rich, dynamic reality, a composite of act and potency, of matter and form, of substance and accidents. “Being” and “to be” are essential insofar as they are broadest in extension (including everything that is outside of nothing) and minimal in comprehension (identified with everything that escapes “nothingness”). But acutely, Xibereta is quick to add that “nothing” begins to exist, in which case “nothingness” would be a vast substructure from which existing things came to be practically at a second moment of time.

“Beings in the mind” are things that do not really exist; they are merely objects of the human mind. In human thought, they exist as if they really existed. “Being” can be attributed to them only insofar as they exist in the mind.

When Xibereta asserts that there is nothing more dynamic than “being”, his only fear was that his expression be taken as something rhetorical. He wished, as usual, to express the objective truth. In this case, the dynamism of “being” he intuited to underlie all the perfectionality of things. His clear statement: we know that there is nothing in creation, even among most evolved forms, that cannot evolve to higher stages.

In line with the Realist school of thought, Xibereta holds that ideal forms such as truth, goodness, beauty, participate in being. He prefers to label them “transcendentals” and time and again he warned his students that in the traditional Aristotelean/Thomistic school, transcendentals were not the same thing in the modern schools of philosophy. For Xibereta transcendentals were identified with “being” itself as its various dimensions. For him transcendentals are “one, true, good and beautiful”, identified as dimensions of being. The Idealists, on the contrary, wrongly identify transcendent not with objective being, but with the thinking subject.

One philosopher with whom Xibereta was glad to dialogue on these matters was his fellow Catalan, Zubiri. With his inborn humility and simplicity, Xibereta had a sort of reverential awe for great minds, for superiors and for authority. His conviction about superiors and even about the Pope was that in his providence God gave us just whom we needed at the time. He illustrated this in a talk he gave to us students on “The Generals I have known”, in which he in his positive way pointed out the providential good that each General in succession brought to the Carmelite Order, even the lamentable

Llovera, who left the Order and became a Cathedral Canon (Xiberta told us that he learned from Llovera, who in some ways was Xiberta's mentor in his youth, not to take oneself too seriously, but rather rely on the prevenient love of God and so to be a basically happy, positive individual. Even those whom he considered to be the bane of modern thought, especially Emmanuel Kant, he saw had the merit of marshalling the "forces of truth" to study the question in depth, something they probably would not have done without the critique of pre-reason of the German philosopher. It was in this context that Xiberta appreciated his personal encounter with philosopher Zubiri, with whom he could not completely agree, but whom he could not help admiring.

With regard to the traditional five proofs for the existence of God, Ramis, Xiberta's commentator, doubts that they are anything more than demonstrations of God's existence for someone who already has faith, but he acknowledges that Xiberta understood them as objective proofs. In fact, in his teaching Xiberta refused to be limited to the traditional five ways; he pointed out that these were just a handy, pedagogical resumé of such proofs. Pointing out that different persons have differing perspectives and needs, Xiberta attempted to give as complete as possible a listing of the proofs of God's existence, even those commonly rejected such as St. Anselm's ontological proof or proofs such as the universal quest for happiness. As usual, Xiberta was true to his maximalistic vision – "about God, the All-important Being, we can never say enough". Anything that might help others reach conviction of God's existence should be listed, if we are convinced that the ultimate fulfilment of man is not found in his own creaturely self, but in the God who made him and destined him for an eternity of happiness in his kingdom. Again, not content with the typical textbook approach, which often he taught was too defective and formalistic and minimal, he made this question one of the longest in his tracts. The argument from motion, for instance, Xiberta showed was in no way restricted to local motion, but to all change from potency to act. This applied, for instance, to the passage from one stage to a higher stage of perfection. God was simply the Perfection in its highest, unbounded state.

Just as Xiberta made much of the subject and predicate reality which he held to be rooted in the nature of things, so he held firmly to the same vision of the transcendental and predicamental order. The transcendental order of a reality, based on its very make-up, extended to all its dimensions and determinations, including everything that constitutes it in being, as opposed to nothing. It would be,

for instance, the human person as subject, including every aspect of what makes the person integral and whole. The predicamental order, in contrast, implies a specific entity, circumscribed by its very nature and so limited and distinguished from others; it determines that one thing is not another. Even identical twins, for instance, will have aspects in this order that affirm their individuality and the uniqueness of each twin.

Again, because it is to be important in theology, Xiberta delved deeply into the meaning of “analogy”. He was not all that satisfied with the traditional scholastic definition. In his search for a proper formulation, he came up with this definition: “Analogous terms are those predicated of distinct subjects with simply diverse meanings, but identical in certain ways”. For Xiberta analogy was an endowment of the human spirit/mind which is able to trace the richness of the relationships between different things. Language is able to express this richness, and in fact the quality of the writings of poets and writers in general depends on this. But even more than language, Xiberta sees this analogy affecting ideas to be predicated of others and relationships with others.

Analogy has many advantages. Firstly, it allows us to apply the theory of universals. Thus it allows us to set up a hierarchy in our concepts. In doing this, it helps us to settle on those which are *quidditative*, i. e. those which express fixed, permanent predicates which are basic to any science. In Xiberta’s case, this was imperative to do for what he considered to be the science of sciences, theology. Thus, he sees the need of Thomistic teaching on analogy because it teaches us not to be content with seeing merely the aspects in which things resemble each other, but also to affirm that all analogates in one category have their *raison-d’être* in a first term. This first analogate, identified with the Supreme Being, God, has nothing at all univocal with creatures, but is the supreme analogate, which makes our talking and writing about God meaningful. Without analogy, theology would be dead because nothing of what we experience would be applicable or expressible of God.

In his teaching on the Supreme Being, God, Xiberta uses all his philosophical acumen to say as much as possible about the virtualities contained in the reality of the Supreme Being. Such is the reality of God as “Pure Act”. Actual perfections prevail over potential perfections until one arrives at an act of being which is absolutely exempt from potency in any form. In class, Xiberta often admonished his students not to allow these philosophical considerations of God to end in the classroom, nor even in one’s vision, but in the chapel, where more

knowledge about God, who is only and purely Act, should make us love him and serve him more. The same could be applied to his teaching on *Aseity*, or independence from all other realities. To be “a se” (contained within oneself) denotes a full, autonomous reality in which existence and essence cannot be distinguished. One’s being comes not from outside oneself (as is the case with all creatures), but from within oneself.

God is “Subsistent Being” which indicates existence that is free of any bonds to another; there is no inhering in another (as is the case with accidentals), but it denotes existence on one’s own. Creaturely subsistent beings receive their being from others. But pure subsistent Being is without potency; rather act and form are found together in the highest form of subsistence.

“Fullness of being” denotes exemption from all limitation rather than the possession of all things at once in an exhaustive and essential way. What for most students would be a rather dry and abstruse consideration would have Xiberta’s enthusiasm and commitment roused to the maximum, as he discovered more and more details about God’s being by analogy. In fact, for meditation he used a well-worn and dated book in several volumes providing daily meditations based on these subtle philosophical and theological distinctions.

The same applied to his consideration and teaching about the attributes of God. Activity is to be moved by another (e. gr. heat, electricity, nuclear energy); it results from within one’s own capacities (life). *Life* itself is immanent and denotes an intrinsic unity, which is not a perfection added on to being, but really a higher degree of being. Xiberta insists on the scholastic truism: *vivere viventibus est esse*.

To take normal manifestations of life in its higher forms – knowledge and volition – Xiberta adds power. *Knowledge* goes beyond information collected. It denotes a mind present to itself, aware of self. In entities without knowledge we note that they are practically absent to themselves. *Volition*, linked with the things desired which are gathered to self, results in a person’s gaining possession of self with a new *raison-d’être*. *Power* denotes the capacity to extend to others the activity which derives from within oneself. Without doubt, it must be admitted that Xiberta has his eye on theology when he delves into these realities and concepts, but his conviction is that it all has a philosophical validity that stands on its own.

Even from the number of references to the distinction between the transcendental and predicamental orders in Xiberta’s writings and teaching indicates the vital importance of this truth in his vision. The transcendental order is first and most important, because it has to do

with the substance, with the person. The predicamental order has to do with something about the substance/person and so ranks second place. The transcendental order is superior insofar as it has to do with existence itself and the kind of existence. The predicamental order has to do with attendant questions, with a whole spectrum of varying importance, for instance, the difference between an alive and a dead person. The modern day concern about the dignity of every human person is based on this experience common to us all. The person is a rational, unique, individual being in virtue of whose more noble type of life, is distinct from all others in the fullest sense.

This ordering of subjects (transcendentals) and predicates (predicamentals) is a datum of our sense experience. This means, for many, that it is not just something in the logical order framed by our mind, but it corresponds to the natural, physical order outside the mind. Fr. Xiberta saw this as critical in order to save, foster and enhance the truth – on all levels, physical, moral, theological and spiritual.

XIBERTA'S THEORY OF VOLITION

Running parallel to our knowing process, but not independent of it is our volitional/willing process. While the two have respective distinct consistencies, the two of them form the superior psychic activity of the human person. Both manifest themselves *extensively* in the sense that the mind becomes all, and *intensively* in the sense that the intelligent subject shows the greatest degree of perfection by the act of understanding.

Knowing subjects are present to themselves/aware of themselves while non-knowing subjects are, so to speak, absent to themselves. By the will act a subject tends towards all and in some way binds them to self and associates them to one's life. This means a self-possession under a new title. Volition, like the knowing process, designates the highest degree of being.

The structure of the will act is three-fold: pleasure/satisfaction/affective appetite (today's expression might be "to be comfortable with", "to be turned on by"); the taking possession of (today's expression might be "owning"); rest/quiet (today's expression: "enjoy"). The affective appetite implies that a rational being is either pleased or displeased with an object so that he/she either desires or rejects the object. In the act of taking possession/"owning", the initial reaction

becomes a free activity. The third stage of rest/enjoyment is the fulfillment of the first two stages.

Xiberta is most insistent on these distinctions because already in his day (what would he say today with an “if you feel comfortable with it, go ahead” mentality?) he saw much confusion about the willing power of the human person. Xiberta already saw exaggerations about the autonomy of the will, a minimizing of the role of the intellect, which led to the inculcating of anti-intellectualistic, intuitive approaches. Xiberta, in season and out of season, insists on the primacy of the intellectual process. The acts of the will demand an interaction with the intellective part.

Tirelessly, Xiberta calls for the need for clarity in order to understand the nature of man’s *free will*. Freedom is a property characterized by *spontaneity*. But spontaneity, too, needs some clarification. When it has to do with our absolute good, for instance, our eternal destiny of happiness, or satisfaction in an ideal value, spontaneity is linked with necessity. In these cases the greatest freedom is to be able to attain the greatest of goods. To be thwarted or frustrated from attainment of one’s definitive fulfillment denotes a defective spontaneity which does not allow a person to attain one’s true, lasting goal. On the other hand, spontaneity has to be with a *relative* good, accompanied by indifference, and in this sense it becomes free will.

To fluctuate between virtue and sin is a very evident imperfection. The *object* and its value influence the freedom with which one elicits an act of free will. A person is supremely free if he/she is able to choose the good which will lead him/her to authentic, lasting happiness. The firm decision of the subject in favor of the right thing, far from threatening one’s spontaneous will act, affirms it much more, because the human will is truly free when it remains rooted in rationality and truth, (e. gr. I am free to deny the presence of the person with whom I am speaking, but my freedom has to take into account the very evident data presented by my reason that he/she is present – and this data I receive through the senses).

Because of the threats to correct teaching on this matter, Xiberta proposes not just to study the theories of “experts”, but to return to reality and deduces the truth from this hard evidence. Inanimate objects are marked by passivity and exteriority. In vegetative life and with irrational animal life passivity predominates. True freedom is lacking because a will is lacking. These are objective facts on which all else follows. Against the English Sensists, for whom there is no

difference between sense experience and knowledge, Xiberta wishes to show the superiority of the human *psyche*. He loudly proclaims an essential difference between human knowledge and purely animal knowledge.

The essential difference between animals and humans is the function of abstraction in which the human person grasps the essence of real things. This is the root of human autonomy which our rational nature confers on us. It is the authentic principle of our voluntary activities which can be and are imputed to us both morally and juridically.

To perceive the essence of things is to have them within us in a kind of eternal way. Sensations are transformed into essential, universal and eternal concepts. This has to do with the person's basic freedom. A person is supremely free when he/she perceives and decides that the norm of acting is not necessarily determined by the sense experience (by the "being comfortable with it" syndrome), but above all by what he/she have attained by their knowing and volitional processes.

Absolute freedom is in God because He needs no voluntary act. He himself is the norm of goodness and value and worth. The human person has to choose to follow good, sometimes at the cost of great sacrifices. With the repetition of acts this becomes not an imposition but because a natural impulse, a constant tendency. The human person, then, is comparable to a heavenly being, whose norm is that of the Supreme Being – when there are no obstacles or temptations to prevent one's fulfillment and ultimate satisfaction, then one is supremely free to let the best in oneself bear fruit. To be able to accept this status is the greatest perfection of freedom.

Of course, man's freedom is always within the limitations of human finiteness. Theoretically we tend to know all things, but practically our intellectual life develops within us in a very limited sphere. Even geniuses have their weak sides. Add to this one's phobias, prejudices, unruly passions and one's limitations are painfully evident in all humans.

Xiberta, in this context, confronted the perennial question, why, if we are free, should we submit to rules of others? Does this go against the dignity of the human person? On this matter, Xiberta, an expert in medieval thought, followed the school of Godfried des Fontaines, who espoused the theory of the *rationality* of the law as contrasted with those who held for the will of the legislator. Thus laws are just if necessary. To follow the will of the legislator, then, is to appeal to the

principle of rationality in society as such and in the human species. Human acts imply the use of the superior functions of man, something that does not obtain when, for instance, man is asleep or distracted.

The value of “merit” is an essential of Catholic dogma as contrasted to Protestant belief. It is not surprising that in this context, as in so many others, Xiberta did his utmost to show the healthy philosophical underpinnings of the Catholic position defined by the Council of Trent. “Merit” is basically a title to certain benefits which have the value of a goal, and Xiberta adds: “in a rational being”. In other beings merit can be applied only analogously insofar as they have qualities like a rational/conscious subject. Xiberta would have another addition to the usual definition: “and which a person acquires by his own efforts”. Thus there is less merit in a person who is naturally gifted than in someone who becomes a great musician by dint of great effort and sacrifices. For instance, baptized infants who die enjoy eternal joys, but not by their own merits, but by Christ’s. Adults have to work out their salvation rendering it “to a certain measure proper to them”.

Merit is something that obtains in the present moment. A person deserves a commendation for the future for things he does in the present. With regard to past actions, if the dispositions continue, there can be merit in an improper sense. But basically merit looks to the future, to benefits that are an end or goal. Merit also results from service rendered to others and to promises, for instance, the prize offered to the winner of a competition or a diploma to students who successfully terminate their studies. Naturally, merit implies some sort of obligation in the person who must judge the merits of the case.

In the case of merit, there must be some proportion or equivalency. For material benefits, a person merits material goods, as in the case of buying and selling. For spiritual benefits, e. gr., friendship, advice, teaching... one merits spiritual benefits. For mixed benefits, as a salary to a worker, there should be both material and spiritual benefits.

In this matter, circumstances are paramount. If a poor man saves the life of a rich man, he merits to be raised from his poverty. If he saves a fellow poor man, the latter owes him a debt of gratitude, and the willingness to save the life of his savior if circumstances call for it. A father who pays for his son’s education merits the son’s filial love. The son who respects his father and acts honorably for his father’s benefit merits the heritage which is already his naturally by birth.

It is by no means easy to measure this proportion/equivalency. Sometimes it can seem to be more a gift than merit, as when a rich man, for some small service rendered, gives a poor man a grand sum, really out of proportion to the work done.

Xiberta is of the opinion that the common understanding of merit *de condigno* is not exact. It is made out, more or less, to describe equivalency between merit and the corresponding object. Xiberta insists that the fine line between merit *de condigno* and *de congruo* is very difficult to define, because of the many degrees in merit. Sometimes *de condigno* obtains in supremely just circumstances while at other times it is given because of a promise or of convenience without a real proportion between the service rendered and the merit earned. *De congruo* merit at times is so apt that the contrary would be most inconvenient; at other times it is so slight that there would be no inconvenience if the opposite obtained.

Much depends on the circumstances and the condition of each person. Otherwise, Xiberta points out, that the Protestants would be correct when they accuse Catholics of having a crass notion of merit, taking it like money or some document with which the Christian is able to buy heaven for himself.

On the question of merit, Xiberta follows the constant teaching of the Church in calling for freedom from necessity, and not merely freedom from force (*à la Jansen*). Xiberta holds that merit derives from the fact that a person is master of his present action. Merit occurs not just when the possibility is open to us to act in an evil manner, but we do not, but also when we act well by the imperative of our conscience even when morally we cannot do anything but good. In his teaching, Xiberta often returned to the example of a mother who loves her child without hesitation, meriting no less than a friend or lover who loves with some reluctance. As he enters into the theological area of grace, Xiberta is staunch in proclaiming that God's grace, in confirming a person in doing good, does not surpress but rather strengthens our free will. "The truth will free you", he often quoted.

In Xiberta's mind, a person's happiness is in direct proportion to the correct use of one's freedom. The Latin expression "*beatitudo*" was preferred by Xiberta; it had much more content than the normal expression "happiness". *Beatitudo*, for Xiberta, includes joy, enjoyment, fruition, happiness. Thus, for Xiberta "happiness" is only one aspect of beatitude, which could be defined as the possession of one's final, definitive good. Authentic beatitude is not attained in this life. Happiness is thus the *finite* expression of the beatitude that awaits the

human person in afterlife. This is one example of why Xiberta, until the end, preferred the use of precise Latin, which is a “dead” language and so could be used with much more surety than constantly changing nuances of modern, living languages.

While Xiberta accepted both Aristotle’s and Boethius’ definition of this supreme happiness, he preferred that of the latter. Aristotle had it as the most perfect activity of the most perfect potency. Boethius has it as the perfect status resulting from the convergence of all good things. Xiberta sees happiness as an integral part of man’s make-up, which includes, as well, knowledge, volition, the exercise of one’s active potency, the moral sense, the aesthetic sense and enjoyment of happiness.

Enjoyment (= fruition, in Xiberta’s terminology) on a sensitive level, can dominate freedom and in some cases even suppress it. Spiritual enjoyment does not depend on sensitive sensations. Xiberta speaks of the euphoric sense as a bearing of concrete ups-and-downs with a sentiment of constant well-being. Happiness/fruition do not compromise freedom on condition that the object of fruition is not situated outside the bounds of rationality. The best freedom on earth is hope in eternal life, insofar as fruition is freed of sensitive limitations, which are always of a passing nature.

For Xiberta supreme happiness for us is “rest of the will in an eschatological good”. Only if rooted in moral good will human happiness provide man with a happiness which gives constant and stable enjoyment. Especially relevant for today is Xiberta’s insistence on the hierarchy of values: if supreme fruition of beatitude is prime in one’s life, then one is capable of supporting a barrage of *contretemps*.

The basic moral principle is to place happiness in the correct objects, leaving as a secondary question the pleasure or lack thereof that might be experienced. Although this view seems dramatically opposed to the modern quest for pleasure at all costs in all forms, Xiberta would never retreat from his conviction that the will should not find its rest in a subjective pleasure, but in the good offered, accepted and acknowledged from without us. It is even better, of course, if accompanied by subjective pleasure, because it is better for the subject, but not for the morality of the voluntary act.

Summing up this vital area, Xiberta taught incessantly that free will is not the result of isolated emotive intuitions, but is a constitutive part of man’s rational nature. Xiberta did not understand how psychology could minimize the quality of the voluntary act. For him freedom should be seen as a part of the ontological make-up of the human person, as a part of the superior *psyche* of the human being.

Man is free because he himself elicits his activities independently of stimuli which might influence him from various directions. The more an act is in conformity with reason, the more man acts *freely*. The greatest freedom, as Xiberta never tired of underscoring, is that to choose the moral good. This leads to the highest degree of human happiness. All this philosophical background served Xiberta to buttress his solid theological arguments for the necessity of the Christian message in its insistence on the Supreme Good, God himself, to be enjoyed definitively in true beatitude.

XIBERTA ON THE REASONABLENESS OF FAITH

For a theologian, the reasonableness of faith is an intriguing question, but a decisive one as well. Xiberta left no stone unturned in his efforts to show that theology is a positive science in the sense that theology has to do with revealed truths, guaranteed truth, which can be expressed in *quidditative* statements. As seen above, theology has its methodology. Ramis opines that Xiberta leans towards the position of Scotus Erigena, namely, that theology is *intellectus quaerens fidem*. But without shadow of a doubt the Catalan professor is Thomistic in inspiration, persistently holding that something can be known about the divine nature, something true though limited, while avoiding the extremes of Theosophy and naturalistic theology.

Xiberta had an obsession to remain a faithful son of the Church. In this context more than once he advised his students that in the long run it is a great advantage that the final word of the Church's official teaching authority, the Magisterium, is in the hands of the bishops and not in that of theologians. The reason, he held: theologians put great stress on the natural gifts of reasoning, while bishops are more likely to take the faith in a broader context, including the pastoral dimension, and so be closer to objective truth. Xiberta viscerally rejected the innovations of the "New Theology" as derived from Modernism and Intuitivism. He staunchly affirmed that faith, according to Scripture, is an *obsequium mentis* and not a mere sentiment diffused in different ways among the peoples.

His was an implacable battle with proponents of Relativism and Subjectivism. These latter accepted faith not as an objective reality received through revelation, but rather as a certain kind of personal feeling which some individuals perceive in their limited consciousness. As a religious sentiment, it is something extremely diluted and imprecise. Xiberta often decried the "modern theologian's" tendency to

reduce theology to description and history. When these moderns concentrate merely on the subjective acts of knowledge, they effectively ring out the death knoll for theology as a science. It becomes history and cultural anthropology. While he nurtured an insightful research into the history of dogmas (and in his various tracts, he scrupulously sought to include as complete an overview of the many opinions on a given question as possible), still he strenuously upheld the limitations of this history, which is only a partial knowledge and not the main point of theology. In his efforts to maintain the objectivity of theology, he refused to concentrate all attention on the knowing subject, while the predicate is dismissed out of hand.

Persistently Xiberta affirmed that both natural and supernatural truths are objects of human thought, which allow the science of theology to be built up. The natural truths are attainable by human reason, the supernatural do not contradict, but they do surpass human reason; they do not escape reason's attempts to say something about them. How the current interest in the supernatural, the occult, even the demonic bring out the truth of Xiberta's contention!

For Xiberta, the all important triad on this question is: faith, contemplation, the intellectual process. Faith, then, is a supernatural gift by which we believe all that God reveals on his absolute authority. It calls for an absolute dependence of the believer on God much as a pupil looks to his teacher, and children to their parents. Contemplation, Xiberta defines as a human act which involves the mind, the will and the senses; by it these human potencies are applied to God and to the things of God. In a certain sense, one leaves self and is immersed in God. In his anxiety to establish the reasonableness of the religious experience, Xiberta stresses the human contribution and not the typically Carmelite appreciation of contemplation as a prime gift of God, which can and should be prepared for, but which in the end, as St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross magisterially taught, cannot be merited and is given as sheer gift to those whom God chooses, often contrary to human expectations.

True to his scholastic vision, Xiberta affirms the beatific vision as the highest form of contemplation, with which God is the supremely active protagonist and man the grateful, passive recipient of so great a gift. But there are many degrees of contemplation leading up to the beatific vision. In order to be authentically real and not just a whim or a fantasy or a dream, both faith and contemplation demand the intellectual process, which above all is a grasping of objects as such outside the mind, i. e., they are essences of existences anterior to the human act of understanding.

In his strenuous defence of the intellectual dimension of both faith and contemplation, Xiberta is thoroughly opposed to a-rational theories. And this is true even in those aspects which imply a healthy dose of feeling and intuition. Even the emotive, mystical experiences cannot do without an object which has been previously presented to the mind. No activity of the Christian religion leads to the unknown, nor is it produced by merely subjective impulse. Human reasoning puts the seal of objectivity on faith and contemplation. In the Christian context this process is based primarily on the objective reality of the person and the teachings of the historical Son of God made man.

Besides this direct grasp of the truth by the mind, Xiberta further insists that faith and contemplation also depend on a *doctrinal dimension* of the truth. Although faith and contemplation above all are directed to and based on really existing objects, we do need propositions which allow us to understand. The ultimate source of our propositions/statements is God, who normally transmits them through the Magisterium of the Church. Smarting under the attacks of adversaries of the traditional intellectualism, Xiberta affirms that what matters really is not the mystical emotion which a person feels, but rather the objects with whom the subject is affectively united. The subject is charged to extract the correct doctrine from the sources. The credal formulas and conciliar teachings were meticulously crafted by the Church – often at great sacrifice and suffering – precisely because the faithful were convinced that the purity of the Catholic faith consisted in the upholding of the orthodoxy of the dogmas.

The need is to stress the *supernatural* dimension of the faith. Many revealed truths do not fit the moulds of our finite minds. As in natural knowledge, so too in the supernatural realm, there must be a learning process; however, it must be even more rigid because we have no recourse except to accept statements based on the authority of the Magisterium. In this field, Xiberta sees the Modernists falling into two errors: firstly, they hold that there is no religion that is objectively “natural” to man; secondly, they affirm that there can be no science about manifestations of religious practices. They simply believe in a certain sense of the sacred or of religiosity. This is precisely the opposite of Xiberta’s position.

The Catalan professor also stresses the *universal, social* dimension of the faith. Faith is a phenomenon spread throughout the world by means of signs, symbols, rites, expressions that unite believers all over the world. These are of an objective and not merely of subjective character. His observation: men only unite in virtue of something

objective, since subjective conditions cause them rather to tend to disintegration.

The three elements – faith, contemplation, the intellectual process – are distinct, but demand an interplay; they are meant to work in conjunction. Again Scotus Erigena encapsulated Xiberta's conviction: "I believe most firmly and I understand as much as is given to me". Xiberta explains that it is not a question of our *obsequium mentis* being first belief, and after believing then we perceive intellectually, but rather that from the very moment that we believe, it is necessary that we activate the intellectual process. There is no faith or contemplation without a previous intellectual process. And on the contrary, it is not that we first put the intellectual process into act on the margins of the faith and then we come to believe, but rather that we activate that process enlightened by grace and guided by an act of faith.

Theology, together with faith and contemplation, are preceded by revelation and catechesis. But the three elements should be seen as concomitant. Xiberta often pointed out that until two centuries ago no theologian denied the objectivity of the faith in the sense that it would be relegated to some *volitional* dimension. The intellectual (= theological) aspect was mostly taken for granted, as demanded by a faith that is authentically catholic, that is, apt to be presented to and accepted by all men of all cultures and times.

The tenacity of Xiberta on this point is evident when he cites his approval of an author whom he many times castigates in his *Introductio in Sacram Theologiam*, Chenu, O.P. With the Dominican theologian, Xiberta does not hesitate to use the term *circumincessio*, i.e. the interpenetration of the three acts – faith, contemplation, intellectual process. Xiberta faces the often posed question: what are the limits of the intellectual process *vis-à-vis* the faith. Humanists and Protestants ridiculed the attempts of Catholic theologians to give a rational basis to the faith; their contention was that Catholics depended too much on human authority. They took their cue from Luther himself, who, in obviously Augustinian tonality, taught: "Faith does not enlighten the intellect but rather our affections". Wycliff would accept only the Fathers of the first Christian millennium because in their theology they did not have recourse to natural reason. The modernistic trend follows suit in affirming that faith is not compatible with natural reason.

In a typically provocative way, one that was not afraid to take the offensive, Xiberta held that it was not only licit, but actually something natural that we should deliver into, investigate our faith by use of our natural faculties. By its very nature, Christian doctrine moves

the believers who are more prepared, to search out and deepen their knowledge of the faith. "Sacred Scripture does not give a doctrinal system about God, but firmly declares Him to be one, and his perfections to be supreme and on given occasions extols his other attributes. It leaves to us the task of building up our integral doctrinal system conformable to the above elements" (*Revue Thomistique*, 1946, p. 68). In the process, questions touching philosophy and the sciences do enter. By itself S. Scripture might appear contradictory at times. Here Xiberta invokes one of his favorite authors, Petavius, S. J., an outstanding patristic scholar, who teaches that human reason is called on to delve into revealed truth. The definitions of the early Church councils on the Trinity, on the Person of Jesus Christ, were the result of such assiduous, minute and sometimes acrimonious study and research. As God uses various signs to transmit his truth to us, there rises the spontaneously felt need to study the nature of the privileged sources – Scripture and unwritten tradition in order to discern the true from the false.

Xiberta often pointed out that over the centuries the Church had not been content merely to repeat the words of Scripture and of the Fathers; the need was felt to produce commentaries that were drawn up systematically in order to show the reasonableness and coherence of revealed truths. Some explanations proved to be heterodox and had to be declared heretical. The scientific study that resulted in theology was the Church's reaction to the ferment within the Church to express the truth authentically. And so resulted a body of doctrine which with arguments capable of combatting error and defending the purity of the faith, was declared the authentic explanation and deepening of the message and mission of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God incarnate.

Because of his Voluntarism, Duns Scotus would not call theology a science, since for him the supreme rule was the dependence of everything on the Will of God, who is above and beyond our definitions and speculations. At first glance, this stance seems to contradict Xiberta's deep-seated intellectualism, but not so in practice. In his conferences, Xiberta, referring to the liturgy as living tradition, often pointed out the responsory for feasts of confessors: "*Amavit eum Dominus et ornavit eum*: God loved the saint and so adorned him with gifts". God loves us not because we are good, but loving us He makes us good. This has a distinctly Scotist ring to it.

The aim of Xiberta's *Introductio* was explicitly to prove the scientific nature of theology. The Scotists and the Augustinian school condemned the Thomists for over-intellectualizing the faith, saying that they watered down the wine like bad innkeepers. Xiberta often

referred to St. Thomas' answer to these accusations: "Those who use philosophical arguments in order to draw Sacred Scripture to serve us in the homage of faith do not mix water with wine, but rather change water into wine".

Scripture and the Fathers do contain certain expressions that seem to demand a simple act of faith, prescinding from rationalization. But orthodox writers defended themselves from those who wanted nothing but repetition of the Scriptures and of the Fathers. They pointed out that already Nestorius had accused St. Cyril of Alexandria, probably Xiberta's greatest hero among the Fathers, of adding too many simply human elements into his argumentations. Xiberta takes these objections seriously, and answers them under several headings.

Firstly, he admits that the mind does not directly demonstrate the truth of a revealed fact, but it does and should show the meaning of revealed truth. Apologetics shows things to be revealed on the authority of God and of his Church. Theology clarifies the truths of the faith as far as possible.

Secondly, one cannot deal with the supernatural by means of the human intellect, but what we say about God we say *by analogy*, given that all perfection belongs to Him more than to creatures, as in the contrast between whiteness in itself and things that are white.

Thirdly, reasoning about the faith does not degrade the latter. Theology does not eliminate the need to know the Scriptures (Xiberta collected all biblical data for his dogmatic tracts as in the *Introductio in Mystera Fidei*), but it has to do with the contents of revelation.

Fourthly, theology does go beyond Scripture. Xiberta insists on the place of Scripture as part of the historical process of revelation entrusted to the Church. As Scripture is not a systematic work, the Church is obliged to go a step further in order to preserve the whole economy of salvation. The Scriptures are a unique, a most precious instrument, but to be taken in a broader context. Theologians may seem at times to neglect Scripture, which presents primary truths, because they take the latter for granted and go on to study derived secondary truths.

The intellectual process, as understood by the likes of St. Thomas Aquinas, was admitted by theologians until the 19th century, when, under the influence of Modernism, some denied that the mind had anything to do with the preambles of faith. Thus faith is made to depend on one's subjective reaction to revelation. Dogma, for the Modernists, becomes an historical expression of subjective faith, but it does not have objective value. The most radical of the Modernists deny even

the value of the Scriptures and of the Fathers in their study; all is reduced to a subjective, historical process. The result is *Positive* theology, which in reality is a study of the evolution of dogmas and how each epoch used its epistemological tools to shape its faith.

Xiberta bemoans the fact that the theologians, his contemporaries, often a-critically accept the terminology of the Modernists, and their method as well. The existential approach has infiltrated theology. Xiberta, who cultivated Latin and defended its advantages for theology, saw that contemporary theology has been influenced by the introduction of the vernacular, which broke with the traditional, exact terminology of theology. More modern expressions have been introduced even by such orthodox theologians as Lonergan... Although firmly and explicitly against a mere repetition of past expressions (Xiberta used Denzinger sparingly for this reason), still until he died he kept up a (losing) battle in defence of Latin, because, as a language out of common use, it is more apt to express the faith both in its essential and secondary expressions.

As the intellectual process is denied in theology, Xiberta sees ambiguity and precipitation to be up-to-date everywhere. In his efforts to solidify his stand on the indispensable role of the intellectual process in theology, Xiberta lists the functions of the intellectual in theology:

- 1) it fosters knowledge of the preambles to the faith;
- 2) it aptly interprets the signs of divine revelation;
- 3) it includes the contents of the sources of revelation and of the Magisterium in a material sense;
- 4) by means of *quidditative* statements, it puts in evidence the revealed objects (and not merely subjective reactions!) – and not only those which are practically self-evident, but also those known in a mediated way;
- 5) it comes to understand the revealed objects, using additional means;
- 6) it possesses the objects subjectively;
- 7) it shows the conformity of what is said about the revealed objects with the sources of revelation, reason and the Magisterium, both of the present and of the past;
- 8) it clarifies all that is opportune for the perfect possession and the handing down (*traditio*) of the objects of the faith.

For Xiberta, the basic dogma is the existence of a personal God, Creator of heaven and earth and source of all life, who is known by

means of the two books – the Scriptures (basis of theology) and the world (basis of apologetics). Belief in the “dogmatic” God is not equivalent to belief in a “philosophical” God. Throughout the course of history, there have been many arguments/proofs/demonstrations of the existence of God. At times these “proofs” have been the source of confusion because they rise from different sources and above all from differing philosophical premises.

Xiberta favors the Thomistic five ways to show the existence of God, but understood as a sampling which is not exclusive. Other authors, whom Xiberta had studied deeply and whom he recommended were Henry of Ghent (Xiberta also espoused his sacramental theory), Hervaeus Natalis, Guido Terreni (this Catalan Carmelite was studied in depth by Xiberta; his volume on Terreni was appreciated by fellow [scholars](#); when objection was made that it was chauvinistic to cite Terreni and Baconthorpe, Xiberta in his typically energetic way countered with: “They’re as good as any of the others; why should we not be proud to cite them if they are members of our Carmelite family?”).

Since Xiberta insisted on Vatican I’s dogma that the existence of God can be known by the human mind even without grace and revelation, he considered it a prime duty of a scholar to take seriously, research, classify and critique the various “proofs” for the existence of God. In fact he gathered a typical collection of these arguments and classified them under three major headings:

- arguments based on the metaphysical condition of creatures, under which he included St. Thomas’s “proofs” from motion, from causal dependence and from degrees of perfection;
- arguments based on physical perfections, under which he gathered “proofs” from the beginnings time of living beings and of rational souls, of the situation of cosmic energy, of the wise ordering of contingent elements, and also of supernatural facts;
- arguments based on man as a rational and personal being, under which he noted the universal sense of religion, the universal moral law, the universal desire of happiness.

He also noted that distinction should be drawn up based on external observation and introspection.

Typically, Xiberta is not content with the traditional presentation as found in the manuals of theology. He used all the resources at his command to delve as deeply as possible into these proofs, which are fundamental to the whole concept of theology and ultimately of reli-

gion/faith. For instance, in the argument from motion, Xiberta is not content with limiting himself to local motion, which lacks finality. With St. Thomas's teaching in *De spiritualibus creaturis*, he broadens the meaning of motion to include *actus entis in potentia, quatenus in potentia*, e. gr. the acts of our understanding and will.

This, in the view of Xiberta, is a more convincing metaphysical argument for the existence of God. In this instance, as in many others, it is evident that Xiberta took objection to the views of theologians seriously and entered into dialogue with them. In his answers, he shows a vast culture, citing authors from Cicero to Francis Bacon. Thus he is able to paraphrase a famous saying: "When scientists begin to uncover the physical causes of events, in which men formerly used to see the hand of God... they easily fall into that frame of mind that makes them think that the conviction of the existence of God is based on ignorance of physical realities and they turn all their sense admiration to nature itself. However, when they experience the secrets of nature more fully they are forced to confess that nature on its own is not able to be the basis of such magnificence as is found in it" (*De Deo Uno*, p. 39). Darwin himself was unable to explain the first beginnings of the world prescinding from God.

Amazingly Xiberta kept up with most recent studies in the world of science and found that contemporary theories, e. gr. "the big bang theory" or "the expanding universe theory" or that of entrophy, buttressed the traditionally Catholic position on the existence of God. He showed no fear of reports that life would soon be produced by scientists in laboratories. If and when this happens, it simply means on the one hand there is one less argument on the list (but many more remain), and on the other hand that God has endowed man with such intelligence as to be able to share in his creative power.

Xiberta considers that practical atheism is as rooted in the human heart as the universal sense of religion, given the innate inclination of man towards sensible things. In man there remains a constant dialectic between the material and the spiritual.

He points out, on the question of authority, that direct, personal apprehension of something is better and surer, but if this is not possible, it is supremely rational to accept the authority of those who have the possibility of direct apprehension, especially when they are many and capable. He affirms this trust in authority as a requirement of human nature itself.

In his commentary, Ramis wonders why Xiberta did not make more of the categorial imperative of Immanuel Kant on the question of the moral order and for the need of a supreme lawgiver (= God).

The answer probably lies in Xiberta's passionate nature. He was viscerally opposed to Kant, "the ruin of philosophy", as he called him. With Kant it was definitely a black-and-white stance, something that Ramis knows very well. How many times we who lived with both Ramis and Xiberta in Sant'Alberto, Rome, saw the two of them arguing about Kant to such a heated degree, that in the end Xiberta had to ask to change the subject because he did not want to spend another sleepless night. The deference which Ramis shows for his mentor is seldom better illustrated than by this posing of the question.

Especially in his theological reasonings, Xiberta often musters *ad hominem* arguments, as for instance: "Due to lack of justice in the present life, we spontaneously direct our minds to an invisible judge who one day will restore rights and justice". Xiberta was not as opposed to St. Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God as most other Thomists, because he held, with St. Thomas, that the existence of God can be justified by the very notion of God. However, he admits that St. Anselm's reasoning is often "childish".

Even though Xiberta valued Thomistic arguments for God's existence above others and he noted that many arguments are deficient, still in class he inevitably taught them all, noting that because of the variety of cultures, of intellectual acumen... some arguments will appeal to some persons and others not. For instance, he pointed out that for many religious people supernatural phenomena such as apparitions will be more convincing than more intellectual arguments.

But until his last breath, Xiberta holds for a God knowable by means of a strictly intellectual process which reveals objective truth. The Church clearly teaches, following the Scriptures and the Fathers, that God can be known by means of the visible works of creation. "The notion of God's existence must be rational, certain, linked with some knowledge which we possess outside the exercise of our faith. It is not enough to accept the existence of God in any which way. A way must be maintained which is conducive to lead all men to God. Not only atheists are enemies of the faith, but also those who overthrow the foundations of the faith, seeking to substitute them with other" (*De Deo Uno*, p. 61). Xiberta made much of the Church's defence of the validity and value of the capabilities of the human mind. He pointed out the paradox, in tones reminiscent of Chesterton, whom he read and admired: the Catholic Church, so often accused of being too other-worldly and concentrated on a pie-in-the-sky reward for good, has especially in our day become the strongest defender of the validity of the powers of the human mind in its natural capacity to attain reality and truth. Xiberta could not hide his pride in the Church's obvious vote of

confidence in the “Natural” gifts bestowed on mankind and especially in the eminently human functions of knowledge, volition and power.

Intellectual apprehension, for Xiberta, is not just a better opinion in order to preserve orthodoxy. It is a *sine qua non* condition for the dogma of the existence of God. Otherwise, only those who were capable of feeling their faith in God by means of an affective movement, could be faithful Catholics. But well-disposed understanding perceives the truth, not everyone will be blessed to be enabled to take pleasure in it. The intellectual process is open to all, from the simplest to the wisest. From creatures we experience and gather together *perfections*, which we attribute to God. We *eliminate* all imperfect aspects which we find in creatures and we raise the perfections to their most eminent degree and then we attribute them to God.

Xiberta kept reverting to the concept of analogy; any and all knowledge we have of God is analogous, i.e. though true as far as it goes, it never reaches God’s real perfection which is infinite and most simple at the same time. This is why Xiberta called for a definition of terms (in his day these were expressed in Latin) in order to avoid equivocation, so that from creatures we come to a knowledge of God’s perfections using expressions which authentically denote God even if in an imperfect way. God’s attributes, then, are not adjectival (e.g. wise, good...) but substantial – in God they imply the totality of what they signify.

With this vision Xiberta stressed that the perfections we find in creatures are also in God, but God is not merely the sum of all created perfections, but their exemplary cause. Reverting to a favorite distinction, Xiberta points out that all we say of God is a *predicate*. It is much more difficult to treat of God as a *subject*. We call Him God not because this is compatible with his dignity, but because of our weakness. And in affirming this, Xiberta insists yet again that we are not allowed to forget the supernatural and sacred dimensions, as parts of the intellectual process. Fundamentally, it is a natural process, but because it is organically linked with the supernatural activities of faith and contemplation, spontaneously it is put into practice in a supernatural way.

Thus, for Xiberta, theology is the study of an intellectual process by which we perceive revealed truth in order to present it to faith and contemplation. This process is acquired by effort; it is not infused. He underscores the inseparability of faith and contemplation, but on condition that with the possession of the divine in a mystical experience, the proper function of the intellectual process is maintained, thus avoiding the loss of the guarantee of objectivity.

Xiberta is wary of Modernist expressions of the faith, such as sympathy, empathy, which stress the subjective motivation for faith. They can be used correctly if they signify the effects of the acceptance of faith, but not its cause.

Some commentators have tabbed Xiberta an integralist. He was a staunch defender of the riches that the past had acquired and he strove valiantly to integrate truths from the past into an overview of the Catholic faith which was definitely maximalist, striving to say as much as possible about truth and Truth, embraced in love. His deepest conviction – and subsequently his greatest fear, that of losing it – was that the integrity of theology passed through a return to classical objectivity. On many counts, he went against the prevailing currents of thought, but the wisdom of his convictions still has to be proved false.

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