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Inhaling Truth, Achieving Wisdom

50 Years STFK Ledalero



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*Felix Baghi, SVD**

PHILOSOPHICAL ACTUALITY

(A Response to Ignas Kleden)

Social sciences deal with reality and facts, but from a philosophical point of view, several questions arise regarding the unavoidable question about the interpretation of what should be accepted as reality. Moreover, reality requires interpretation and understanding—a task for interdisciplinary collaboration in order to arrive at options for action.

Introduction

This article is a response to Ignas Kleden's paper concerning the relationship between the Social Sciences and Contextual Theology.¹ Given the significant contribution to the world of research by social scientists and contextual theologians, this response is not simply an affirmation, but rather a wider assessment when viewed from the domain of practical philosophy.

The interesting thing about Ignas Kleden's paper is the flow of his argument which is constructed systematically and supported by a vocabulary from the world of social sciences. In addition, here and there, the argument is polished with a deep philosophical nuance. His focus is on the role of the social sciences and theology, and the interrelationships between social science, systematic theology and contextual theology. For an academic community such as STFK Ledalero celebrating its Golden Jubilee Year, Ignas Kleden's paper is an invaluable contribution for further reflection.

Initial Presuppositions and the Temptation of Realism

Initial presuppositions can be noted in Ignas Kleden's acceptance of Immanuel Kant's view that in order to avoid some kind of antinomy—

* For his biography, see 9f.

¹ Ignas Kleden, "Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Teologi Kontekstual," *Ceramah pada Pembukaan Tahun Jubileum Emas 50 tahun STF Ledalero* (Maumere, 15th September 2018).

two statements that contradict each other—empirical traits must be affirmed as characteristic in the natural and social sciences. When researchers focus their attention on empirical realities that can be observed in society, they are required to describe social reality “as it is.” This demand is made so that the social science researcher is not trapped in *a priori* hypothetical decisions.

In addition, these demands also need to be taken into account so that the results of research by social scientists are not based solely on value judgment, but on reality judgment,² for researchers examine observable reality. In other words, social scientists’ research is based on “existing and knowable conditions,” and not on “something that must be done.”³ But yes, quite possibly, with research intentions like these, researchers could well fall into the temptation of realism,⁴ the temptation to become the “realists” for real.⁵

The temptation is to discover a basic problem to justify their position when they talk about the substance of reality “as it is.” Reality as an empirical phenomenon does not possess its own voice. Reality requires a kind of spokesperson, who in this case are the social scientist researchers who, when carrying out their mission, try to explain and interpret empirical facts according to the project, methodology and motivation behind their thinking.

Another concern can occur, namely that through the pretension of empirical evidence, social science researchers affirm the results of their research as a “new world,” that is, a world of knowledge formulated as the world of the researchers’ conclusions. This kind of world, by borrowing Popper’s distinction about the theory of the three worlds, is the “world of knowledge containing objects of thought”⁶ from the researchers. In other words, the “new world” is a world of images of the results of research, and this world is independent because it has building calculations and theories that depart from their data.

² Ibid., 4.

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *Of Reality. The Purpose of Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press 2016, 67.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Here, we are invited to return to the epistemic distinction of the three worlds according to Karl Popper. The first world is the world of physical objects or the world of objects. The second world is the world of consciousness, the mental world; and the third world is the world of knowledge which contains the objects in the mind of scientists. Karl Popper, *Epistemologia senza soggetto conoscente*, Roma: Armando Editore 1983, 150.

As a consequence, the new world is no longer like the world “as it is,” but “what is expected” by researchers. If this is so, then the risk is that a realist—that is, a researcher in the empirical sciences—becomes less realistic. The realists are guilty of too little realism: they do not manage to grasp and describe “adequately” the experience from which it arises.⁷ Of course, there is a reason, that in relation to empirical evidence, the task of researchers in the social sciences is to look for various possibilities, to the extent that they can provide adequate evidence for the confirmation of empirical truth.

Conflict Interpretation

The most fundamental problem is how social science researchers clarify the existence of a reality as an empirical fact (*realismo ontologico*). In addition, when viewed from a methodological perspective (*realismo metodologico*), how something becomes normative for researchers, namely how they make references about the thesis in their methodology according to reality as it is.⁸ In other words, there needs to be an adequate correlation between the actual reality and realistic methods. This correlation brings researchers to the relationship between knowledge of reality (epistemology) and the essence or nature of actual reality (metaphysics). If the purpose of research is to approach truth, then the most fundamental problem is how to interpret research data to approach an empirical truth. What is empirical truth? How is that truth interpreted?

Here, we are invited to talk about the hermeneutics of empirical truth. Empirical academics, more specifically social scientists, focus their attention on interpretation in the context of empirical epistemology, namely that in order to arrive at epistemic claims, the data collected needs to be verified through a reliable interpretation. Of course, the results of the verification and interpretation will then become the basis of their empirical evidence.

With the hermeneutics of truth, I am reminded of the well-known maxim of Nietzsche: *there are no facts, only interpretations*, and he continued, *this too is an interpretation*.⁹ Truth in the world of research is truth as the result of interpretation. Most likely, this truth can lead to conflict. When social researchers justify their research findings, they

⁷ Vattimo, *Of Reality*, 68.

⁸ Franca D’Agostini, *Realismo? Una Questione non Controversa*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri 2013, 19.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Later Notebooks*, ed. R. Bittner, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, 139.

first collect data on their findings. There is a presumption that the act of collecting data is already a description; while the interpretation of the description is re-description. Therefore, there is a kind of re-description in the light of conflicting interpretations.

In addition, when hermeneutics moves into a broader field, namely to *le problème général de la compréhension*,¹⁰ the relationship between interpretation and understanding (*compréhension*) becomes more open to many assumptions, metaphors, symbols, and languages used by researchers to explain reality. This openness can be seen, for example, at the semantic level, the level of reflection, and the existential level, where, at all of these levels, social researchers try to place their research in a more open horizon of meaning. Interpreting means exposing the many possibilities that come from reality, from the living world, from reality and from the situations that occur.

Once again, reality does not speak of itself. Reality is only a given fact; reality needs an interpreter. However, the problem is that each interpreter is always motivated by projects and interests supported by a wealth of “language games” from a certain perspective.

Another point to be raised concerns “sociological justification.” Researchers in the social sciences, through empirical evidence, work professionally to obtain a kind of “social justification,” namely affirmation of social facts through normative claims that they hold fast. The issue is whether the social justification of the researchers functions only as a mediation between facticity and validity in their research world. Or, can a justification be considered a valid possibility in the world of their research, or is it also open for other possibilities given its social nature?

When we talk about social justification, we will naturally be faced with a normative and descriptive understanding of a social order. Social order is a “justified order” through which we are allowed to return to a basic norm of social life. And that norm, from the perspective of social order analysis, is related to *a duty or a right to justification*.¹¹ Social scientists have the right to justify empirical reality, and that right is considered a normative claim that bridges the facticity and validity of social reality.

If we understand social order as justification, social scientists, contextual theologians and social philosophers have a right and duty over social justification. However, it should also be taken into consideration

¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Le Conflit des Interprétations, essais d'herméneutique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1969, 8.

¹¹ Rainer Forst, *Normativity and Power. Analysing Social Orders of Justification*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017, 13.

that the complexity of society greatly influences the complexity of social justification; and because of that, the important point here is to understand the context of the “lifeworld” horizon properly. Here, the role of social philosophy becomes very important, considering that the task of philosophy is to reflect social reality from its practical perspective.

Practical Philosophy

I do not object to Ignas Kleden’s pointer that “social philosophy makes suggestions based on a reasonable consideration of what must be done to the reality at hand.”¹² Perhaps, what Ignas means by “reason judgment” here, leads us to Immanuel Kant’s claim about practical reason. I have the impression that Ignas’s building of argumentation is framed by a practical philosophical frame of thinking, with the principle of categorical imperatives as its main foundation. “Do it in such a way that the reasons for your desire are at once and can always be the principle for making laws for all people.”¹³ In social philosophy, the principle of categorical imperatives is part of the principle of practical reason.

By social philosophy, I intend to underline the expansion of its understanding which comes from “practical philosophy,” which since Aristotle has been affirmed as a basis, both for practical knowledge (*praktikês*) and for the purpose of an action (*ergon*).¹⁴ Since its inception, philosophy has opened up and focused its attention on practical matters.

Philosophy has also tried to explain reality, and that explanation lies not only in the description of reality as it actually is, but in the search for answers about the reasons why reality exists. Of course, the search for answers about causes, for example what causes injustice or why injustice must occur, opens up the possibility of philosophical reflection to engage not only on the theoretical side based on the capacity

¹² Ignas Kleden, *op.cit.*, 16.

¹³ Quoted from Ignas Kleden, *Paradigma Ilmu Pengetahuan: Tantangan Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora di Indonesia*, in: Ignas Kleden/Taufik Abdulah (eds.), *Paradigma Ilmu Pengetahuan dan Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Lipi Press 2017, 68.

¹⁴ “It is right also that philosophy should be called knowledge of the truth. For the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action.” Aristotle, *Metaphysics II*, in: Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1995, 993b 20-23.

of pure reason (for example the theory of injustice), but moves on the operational side, with the power of practical reason that guides every praxis to overcome injustice.

Here it should be emphasized that practical philosophy is understood not only because its object is deed as deed, in the sense that it is limited to theoretical arguments about the ability of humans to do something. More than that, it relates to whether every human action has a purpose, for example “living well (*eu zen*),”¹⁵ meaning to live in such a way that all of life’s abilities are directed perfectly for the sake of happiness.

Problem – Theory – Criticism

Underlining the praxis dimension, issues of life that are well reflected on have had an impact on social philosophy, namely that social philosophy—like other social sciences—sees itself as a discipline of study built upon the basis of “problem – theory – criticism.”¹⁶ These three bases provide the basic colour for social philosophy as a scientific discipline that has a rational-praxis dimension. This discipline begins with the ability of philosophy itself to open space for discussion, and in that space, philosophical reasoning always appears as a counsellor for awareness of the existence of philosophical problems.

In social philosophy, awareness of problems in reality is the beginning of the development of reflection and criticism. Awareness of an issue becomes important if philosophical reflection on each issue is to open up possibilities for the construction of theory and criticism. When Ignas Kleden speaks of “reality as it is” as a precedent for empirical sciences, then in social philosophy, “social problems” are presuppositions for philosophical theories. Every theory, for example critical theory, linguistic theory, or hermeneutic theory, is not built to form a monad system closed to certain truths. Epistemologically, every theory is always open to criticism, and this openness allows the theory to be criticised. Because of its openness to criticism, a theory can also be imputed (falsifiable).

Starting from this epistemological conviction, we cannot possibly prove valid (valid at the level of absolute truth) a particular theory or way of thinking. There is always the possibility that a theory will be

¹⁵ Enrico Berti, *Il bene di chi? Bene pubblico e bene privato nella storia*, Genova: I Rombi Marietti 1820, 2014, 25.

¹⁶ Dario Antiseri, *Didattica della Filosofia, il mestiere del filosofo*, Roma: Armando Editore 1999, 9.

tested again. If a theory can be tested, it must logically be open to the possibility of being imputed. Popper talks about the logical investigation of falsifiability,¹⁷ which is the process of investigating the logical order of a theory of knowledge, which begins by detecting basic statements, in order to arrive at conclusions about the existence of certain statements that are truly fundamental.

What is always undertaken by philosophy is an attempt to contextualize its reflection in line with developments in the situation and in problems in human life. This effort is made so that philosophy itself is not trapped into what some contemporary thinkers are concerned about, namely “the end of philosophy.”¹⁸ This anxiety was born as a result of the effort of philosophy always to go beyond itself (post philosophy, post truth), and from the impact of rapid developments in science.

Heidegger once said, “the end of philosophy” is always a good start for “thinking,”¹⁹ which is to ponder what has not been thought about seriously about the reality of life. In this context, “truth” (*alétheia*) can be understood as an open horizon, or an open paradigm that enables confirmation of every social reality through a never-ending process of verification or falsification.

Today, the actuality of philosophy can be understood from the ability of philosophers to revise and formulate their arguments more adequately so as to respond to social situations. For example, in the midst of the rise of globalisation and the revolution in communication technology, we experience that social life is being confronted with religious movements and aggressive forms of fundamentalism. Things like these have provoked and challenged philosophy to be more open in dialogue with the existing situation.

In line with this, I do not think Habermas intends to restrict philosophy, for example by publishing two works on *Post-metaphysical Thinking*.²⁰ Considering that his basic assumptions are always about

¹⁷ Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London: Hutchinson 1977, 84.

¹⁸ Franca D’Agostini talks about *Fine della Filosofia* or the end of philosophy in the context of philosophy that has surpassed him, and the rapid development of the diversification of science. Franca D’Agostini, *Analitici e continentali*, Milano: Raffaello Cortine Editore 1997, 21-50.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking, in: *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper Trochbooks 1972, 55-73.

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, transl. by William Mark Hohengarten, Cambridge, MA–London: The MIT Press 1992, and *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2017.

the act of communication in the living world, Habermas opened his philosophical discourse about *Post-metaphysical Thinking II* by giving accentuation to “lifeworld” as a space for good rationality.²¹

The lifeworld is the horizon through which the research actions of social scientists, theologians and philosophers build their interactions to understand each other. It is hoped that through the lifeworld as a common horizon, the interaction of researchers can be more oriented to what Habermas means by *intersubjective understanding*.²² Here the lifeworld needs to be considered as a reference to a symbolic framework for researchers to achieve mutual understanding. With this achievement, it is hoped that they will no longer be too dependent on the legitimacy of their respective rationalities or the authority of their knowledge. For a good life together, researchers, whether social scientists, theologians or philosophers, do not have to rely on just one common assumption.

It appears that the presentation of Ignas Kleden, specifically at the end of his paper, presents a major challenge to STFK Ledalero in building up an academic community, where researchers in social sciences, systematic theology, contextual theology and social philosophy, should maintain their role as “intellectuals” with a balance between the *sense of reality* and the *sense of possibility*. Of course, this balance is only possible if the academics in this institute construct their community as an academic community who not only live together in a formalistic and rigoristic way, but also dynamically and capable of living together intellectually.

Intellectual interaction within an institute is not only built with a strict “logic of order” framework because of its highly structural demands, but with a “logic of discovery” framework that is rich in creativity, open to the power of social and cultural imagination, and sensitive to messages of religious and cultural symbols alive with metaphor.

By briefly formulating the role of each discipline in the final part of his paper, Ignas seems to leave an open space. Each party from the same or a different discipline is expected to be able to open up, make a critique of what is being done by fellow academics, and respond to research in discussions that are rich in the dialectics of mature questions and answers. Of course, the aim is not just to achieve a kind of “fusion of horizons” to test each prejudice or to show off its intellectual capacity, but at a more human level of family, to build a kind of “sharing

²¹ Id., *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, xv.

²² Id., *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, transl. by William Rehg, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 1998, 524, footnote 18.

research experience” in the context of a shared life that is binding on an academic community such as STFK Ledalero.

ABSTRACTS

Die Sozialwissenschaften beschäftigen sich mit Realität und Tatsachen, aber in philosophischer Sichtweise stellen sich verschiedene Fragen im Zusammenhang mit dem unumgänglichen Thema der Interpretation dessen, was als Wirklichkeit überhaupt angenommen werden soll. Darüber hinaus verlangt die Wirklichkeit nach Interpretation und Verständnis – eine Aufgabe für interdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit, um zu Handlungsmöglichkeiten zu kommen.

Las ciencias sociales manejan realidad y hechos, pero en una perspectiva filosófica surgen varias cuestiones en cuanto a la inevitable pregunta sobre la interpretación de lo que se debería aceptar como realidad. Más allá de ello requiere la realidad de una interpretación y comprensión – una tarea para la colaboración interdisciplinar que debe desembocar en opciones para la acción.

Les sciences sociales traitent de la réalité et de faits, mais d'un point de vue philosophique se posent plusieurs interrogations concernant la question inévitable de l'interprétation de ce que l'on doit accepter comme réalité. De plus, la réalité requiert interprétation et compréhension – tâche qui nécessite une collaboration permettant d'arriver à des choix pour l'action.

*Felix Baghi, SVD**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF STFK LEDALERO

As an educational institute, Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Katolik (STFK) Ledalero (Ledalero Catholic Institute of Philosophy) has continued the function while remaining an integral part of St. Paul's SVD Major Seminary of Ledalero. The initiative to establish seminaries for candidates for the priesthood from the East Nusa Tenggara Province of Indonesia (then still a Dutch colony) was taken by Prefect Apostolic Arnold Verstraelen, SVD, who opened the first minor seminary in Sikka.

This initiative was in response to the appeal of Pope Benedict XV (1914–1922) in *Maximum illud* (30th November 1919) on the urgent need to educate local clergy. And so, the first minor seminary for East Nusa Tenggara was opened in Sikka on the south coast of Flores on 2nd February 1926. Three years later, in 1929, the minor seminary was moved to Mataloko, Ngada, in central Flores. Out of the 26 minor seminarians from the first three intakes in Sikka, a total of 19 transferred to Mataloko.

By 1932 the first intake had completed their studies at the secondary school. However, discussion concerning the continuation of their studies had not yet been finalized. During this transition period, in 1932, five prospective students from the first intake at Mataloko attended philosophy lectures given by P. C. Molenaar, SVD. The following year seven of his students were enrolled in the newly established SVD novitiate, also at Mataloko, with another three novices accepted in 1934, and a further four in 1935. In 1936, the first intake completed their studies in philosophy and began their studies in theology. The same year, the second intake began their studies in philosophy, while the third intake was still in novitiate.

Out of the 14 SVD novices, 10 had graduated from the seminary at Sikka, that is, four from the first intake and three from each of the next two intakes. Out of these 10 novices, six (60%) were later ordained as missionary priests, one of whom became in 1951 the second Indonesian to be ordained a bishop, namely Gabriel Manek, SVD (1913–1989), initially bishop of Larantuka in east Flores (1951–1961), and

* Felix Baghi SVD is the Prefect of Scholastics (the SVD students) at Ledalero.

then when the hierarchy was established in 1961, Manek was transferred to Ende as its first Archbishop (1961–1968).¹

The formation of these SVD novices took place in a building called the *Rumah Tinggi*, opposite the minor seminary of Mataloko. Here, a temporary major seminary for local clergy had been built, while the search went on for a more suitable place. Verstraelen was also waiting for authorization from the Vatican.

The Major Seminary at Ledalero

It was decided that the major seminary would be moved to an 18-hectare site on Ledalero hill in the Regency of Sikka, some nine kilometres from the coastal town of Maumere. Construction began in 1936. On 20th May 1937 the Vatican gave authorization for the establishment of a major seminary. With Vatican authorization, on 3rd June the SVD Superior General in Rome stipulated that the major seminary be moved from Mataloko to Ledalero. Two months later, in August 1937, Ledalero major seminary was officially opened. Paul the apostle was declared the patron of the seminary, and so the institute was named St. Paul's Major Seminary of Ledalero.

The number of candidates increased over time, in line with improvements in schooling and the establishment of new minor seminaries: the Seminary of St. Dominic at Hokeng, Flores (1950), Mary Immaculate Seminary at Lalian, Timor (1950), the Holy Spirit Seminary at Tuka, Bali (1953), and the Pius XII Seminary at Kisol, Flores (1955). Out of those who enrolled in the novitiate, an average of around 40% went on to become missionary or diocesan priests.

To give an opportunity to seminarians who had decided not to continue in the SVD or to be ordained, but wished to complete their studies at Ledalero Institute, a meeting of the seminary committee of the SVD Ende Province on 15th April 1969, with SVD Superior General John Musinski present, specified that St. Paul's Major Seminary of Ledalero be recognised by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Jakarta in order that it could confer recognised degrees. With government recognition the institute was named *Ledalero Catholic School of Philosophy and Theology*. That same year its operational permit was granted by the Indonesian Government.

On 14th June 1971 the government acknowledged the undergraduate programme, and so Ledalero could grant a BA or *sarjana muda*

¹ As the Second Vatican Council opened (October 1962) there were just three native Indonesian members of the 27-strong hierarchy: Djajasepoetra, SJ, in Jakarta, Soegijapranata, SJ, in Semarang, and Manek, SVD, in Ende.

undergraduate degree.² In 1976 the status of STFTK Ledalero was upgraded and on 22nd January 1981 it was granted equalized status for the BA programme, and registered status for the *sarjana lengkap* programme (a four-year bachelor degree). In 1984 the bachelor degree programme achieved recognized status and the name of the institute was changed to Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Katolik Ledalero (STFK Ledalero), which name has been retained since then. In 1990, the bachelor degree programme achieved equalized status.

A master's degree programme was initiated in 2002 under the auspices of the Department of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. This programme focuses on contextual theologies. In 2004 the master's degree programme achieved recognized status in accordance with Decree No. DJ.IV/HK.00.5/96/2004.

The administrators of Ledalero Institute have made efforts to improve the quality of its teaching over time, with fairly satisfactory results. Since the implementation of the accreditation system, STFK Ledalero has always been accredited Grade "B" with a score of 358, only three scores short of attaining Grade "A". The latest accreditation was carried out in 2016.

Initially Ledalero seminary and STFK Ledalero only enrolled two types of students, namely SVD seminarians and diocesan seminarians. At first the diocesan seminarians resided at Ledalero Seminary, but in 1955 an inter-diocesan campus was built at Ritapiret, a couple of kilometres up the road from Ledalero. STFK Ledalero has since enrolled lay students, many of whom were former seminarians.

Widening the Scope

The Carmelites (O.Carm) began to send students to Ledalero in 1995, the Rogationists (RCJ) in 2005, the Vocationists (SDV) in 2007, the Camillians (OSCam) in 2010, the Stigmatines (CSS) and the Somascans (CRS) in 2012, the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord (CJD) in 2014, and the Barnabites (CRSP) in 2015. Several sister congregations have also been sending students. In 1985 the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) were the first to send students to STFK Ledalero, followed by the Congregation of the Followers of Jesus (CIJ), the Sister Oblates of the Holy Spirit (CSV), and more recently other sister congregations. The admission of students not affiliated with any religious congregation began in the 1990s.

² Directorate General of Higher Education of the Department of Education and Culture decree No. 257/DPT/B/1971.

The number of students has risen dramatically over the years. At the end of the 1960s the total number of students was 68. In the 1970s the number had risen to 375, an average increase of 37.5 students a year. In the 1980s the number of enrolled students noticeably increased to 1,116, an average increase of 112 students a year. In the 1990s the number of students increased to 1,339, an average of 134 a year. A decade ago, the number of students totalled 1,454, an average of 145 students a year. Over the last eight years, the total number of students significantly increased to 1,517, an average of 190 a year. Thus, over these 50 years the total number of students enrolled at STFK Ledalero comes to 5,869, an average totalling 117 students a year.

In December 2018 the student body of STFK Ledalero totalled 1,109, that is, 961 bachelor degree students and 148 master's degree students. The biggest group among the 961 bachelor degree students are diocesan seminarians (246 students, 25.6%), followed by the SVD (228 students, 23.7%), laymen and women (204 students, 21.2%), Scalabrinians (64 students, 6.7%), Carmelites (51 students, 5.3%), Rogationists (42 students, 4.4%), Camillians (35 students, 3.6%), Somascans (33 students, 3.4%), Vocationists (20 students, 2.1%), Stigmatines (16 students, 1.7%), and other religious congregations (22 students, 2.3%). Diocesan seminarians (44 students, 29.7%) are also the biggest group at the master's degree level, followed by the SVD (43 students, 29.1%), laymen and women (25 students, 16.9%), Carmelites (13 students, 8.8%), Camillians (8 students, 5.4%), and other religious congregations (15 students, 10.1%). Other congregations that send their students to STFK Ledalero are the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and occasionally the Trappists.

The number of lay students has grown over time. However, this is the result of an increase in the number of former seminarians continuing their studies at Ledalero rather than an increase in the number of lay students enrolling, which remains very small. The number of lay students increases as seminarians leave the seminary.

The increase in the student body of STFK Ledalero largely depends upon two factors. The first factor is the number of seminaries, both minor and major, in Nusa Tenggara. Until the end of the 1950s, Ledalero depended on only one minor seminary, that of Mataloko. Since the end of the 1950s, a number of other minor seminaries have been opened and send their alumni to Ledalero, such as Hokeng, Lalian, Kisol, and Tuka seminaries. Since the mid-1980s several other minor seminaries have been established: St. Rafael's at Oepoi, Kupang in Timor, Sinar Buana at Weetebula in Sumba, and in Flores, John Paul II in Labuan Bajo, and Mary, the Mother of All Nations, in Maumere.

Many students from these minor seminaries enrol at STFK Ledalero. In addition to minor seminaries, several major seminaries have also been established in the vicinity of Ledalero. Thus, an increase in enrolments is to be expected.

The second factor is the reluctance of former seminarians to transfer to another study programme when they leave the seminary. Although from the perspective of job opportunity, philosophy and theology do not offer many opportunities apart from teaching or working with the Department of Religious Affairs.

Focusing on the education of candidates for the missionary and diocesan priesthood, STFK Ledalero does not enrol as many students as other institutes of higher education. The biggest annual intake is around 200, while the total number of bachelor's and master's degree students is only around 1000.

As an educational institute for seminarians and missionaries, graduates from STFK Ledalero do not work only in Indonesia but increasingly abroad. For several of the religious congregations, the assignment of missionaries to different parts of the world depends upon those who graduate from STFK Ledalero. For instance, around 500 SVD missionaries have worked abroad since the beginning of the 1980s. Indeed, it can be said that STFK Ledalero is a key source of cross-cultural missionaries working in all five continents throughout the world. This is a remarkable contribution that East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, is providing for the world.