

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR CONNELLY—II

Professor Connelly has presented this Society, I believe, with a paper that is masterful in its summary-analysis of much of the *status questionis* among the major Catholic progressive theologians, especially his interpretations of Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and Edward Schillebeeckx. He is entirely correct, I believe, in claiming their authority for his own position on the central issues which his wide-ranging paper focuses upon. Although I have great respect for Professor Connelly's positions on these central issues, as well as an almost inordinate admiration for Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Lonergan on most theological issues, I must respectfully decline to agree with him or with them on certain major aspects on the issue of the nature of theology.

I regret that neither time nor the role of reactor allow me the luxury of expanding upon all the issues in Professor Connelly's lengthy and erudite paper with which I do agree. Rather I will employ the brief time available simply to state those agreements and then focus upon the main issues in Professor Connelly's own constructive position which seem to me unconvincing.

Those areas of agreement are important and already argued for in Professor Connelly's own paper. First, I agree wholeheartedly and for the reasons he advances that theology must be a highly technical discipline, indeed a scientific one. Second, I agree that such disciplined theological reflection must hold itself accountable to both our human experience and to the Christian fact. Third, I agree that a reductionist position of either the secularist or the dogmatist kind is inadequate to both our experience and to the Christian tradition—although I strongly disagree that some of the positions labelled secularist or reductionist by Professor Connelly—for example, Schubert Ogden's—are at all legitimately described in those terms.

Finally, I agree that the phenomenon called the "Christian fact" can be described as comprising both what the contemporary Catholic theological tradition refers to as the component of the "outer word" and an "inner word." The "outer word" factor can be accurately described as the historical phenomenon of the Christian tradition or wit-

ness itself. I do not, however, find convincing the insistence that an "inner word" component must necessarily comprise not only the grace of God but the explicit personal faith stance of the theologian qua theologian himself.

The reasons why I am unconvinced by what Professor Connelly correctly describes as the traditional position of theologians can perhaps best be articulated by stating what I understand to be certain difficulties with Professor Connelly's position. In the course of citing these internal difficulties, I will also briefly outline some constructive alternatives to it. Probably the most helpful way, however, to clarify the disagreement is to recall Professor Connelly's own helpful formulation of the three principal questions to which his paper responds: (1) Can theology come to grips with its own self-understanding and defend its right to scientific existence without falling victim to reductionism, whether of the secularist variety or of the positivist variety, biblical or doctrinal? (2) What is the relationship between the *scientia* of the theological practitioner and the inner grace of faith? Is faith necessary for the work of theology? In other words, if it is true that there cannot be faith without theology, is it likewise true that there can be no theology without faith? (3) The third question is the question of the convention. Is there a Catholic theology?

Question 1:

Can theology come to grips with its own self-understanding and defend its right to scientific existence without falling victim to reductionism, whether of the secularist variety or of the positivist variety, biblical or doctrinal?

What is needed for a full response to Professor Connelly's own position on this question is, I believe, a greater use than he himself employs of what he nicely labels "The vanishing art of the distinction." That there is a positivism implicit in either a dogmatist position or in certain secular theologies that are correctly described as secularist I fully concede. However, there are other alternatives: for example, a secular theology that takes with full seriousness Professor Connelly's own call for fidelity to our common human experience to the point where one affirms fully the secular faith in the ultimate meaning of our

lives here and now in space and time is a secular but not a secularist position. I believe it can be demonstrated philosophically that our common human experience itself is contradicted by the secularist negation of both a religious dimension to and a theistic referent for that experience. More specifically, although Paul van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* is correctly described as a secularist position, either Schubert Ogden's or Gabriel Moran's or Gregory Baum's—or my own position—is correctly described as a secular but not a secularist theology. They are secular theologies in the straightforward sense of appealing for theological evidence to our common human (and thereby secular) experience as warranting claims to both religious and theistic interpretations of that experience. They are not secularist positions in the equally straightforward sense of again advancing experiential evidence against the secularist negations of the religious and theistic interpretations of our common experience.

Although I believe that just such a distinction between the authenticity of secularity and the inappropriateness of secularism can be defended philosophically and historically at length (in fact I have tried to do so elsewhere), I realize that such a necessarily lengthy defense cannot be attempted in this brief time. However, the question remains a valid one for Professor Connelly to respond to in so far as his entire discussion, while pleading for distinctions, chooses to ignore completely this now reasonably familiar distinction between a commitment to secularity and a commitment to secularism. In so far as this distinction is lost in contemporary theology, it becomes difficult to understand how Professor Connelly can really maintain his explicitly stated commitment to the theologian's responsibility to our common human experience. Indeed, I cannot help but wonder exactly what common human experience does Professor Connelly plan to employ if not our contemporary secular experience? Is he really committed, as he assures us he is, to the model of theological reflection which demands fidelity to both our human experience and to the Christian fact—or, as I consider more likely—is he really committed to the "inner word" (i.e. personal Christian faith of the theologian) component of the "Christian fact" as the real—indeed implicitly the sole—"experiential" factor in his model for theology. How, if that is the case, does he really avoid the doctrinal reductionism which he warns us against?—which brings us, perforce, to

his more extensive analysis of the "experience" in question for the theologian in his response to his second question.

Question 2:

What is the relationship between the "scientia" of the theological practitioner and the inner grace of faith? Is faith necessary for the work of theology? In other words, if it is true that there cannot be faith without theology, is it likewise true that there can be no theology without faith?

The key to Professor Connelly's response to this question is, I believe, his repeated insistence that the personal faith of the theologian is in fact necessary for the successful exercise of theology. But once again, I am puzzled to find certain distinctions absent from the discussion of the meaning of the "faith" necessary for the theologian. First, does Professor Connelly accept the distinction between faith as an attitude or orientation and beliefs as the cognitive clarification of that attitude? If so, what is he really demanding that the theologian qua theologian possess in order to do theology? Some of his statements (for example, his appeal to Bernard Lonergan's notion of the need for "religious conversion") seem to suggest that he means "faith"; other statements (for example, his discussion of "ecclesial faith") seem to suggest that he also means explicit beliefs.

However, whatever one's response to that first question may be, the more fundamental question is this: if the theologian—precisely in order to do *scientific* theology—must necessarily possess personal faith, as Professor Connelly maintains, then what really is one to search for here? One might simply mean what I take to be the entirely correct and anti-positivist hermeneutical assumption which maintains that in all the human and philosophical disciplines and thereby in theology, the interpreter in order to understand the texts, symbols, events and witnesses requiring interpretation must have some pre-understanding of the subject-matter expressed in those texts (presumably religion for theological texts). Now, if that is what Professor Connelly means, then anyone except for the most narrow positivist historian or philosopher would readily agree with his insistence. For if that pre-understanding alone is what is needed then our common human indeed secular experi-

ence precisely as human will more than suffice for the properly subjective or experiential element needed to interpret the Christian tradition. This seems to me to follow unless we are to maintain (as Professor Connelly clearly does not maintain) that religious meaning (either as a religious dimension to our common experience or as explicitly religious experience) is somehow radically separated from our common human experience. If it is thus radically separated, then clearly it cannot provide the adequate pre-understanding of the subject-matter needed to interpret religious texts. If, however, it is not thus separated but on the contrary present in our common human experience, then the latter seems clearly to suffice as the pre-understanding needed. Such seems to me to be the logic involved not only in my own position but also in Professor Connelly's own insistence upon both theology's scientific (and thereby public) status and theology's need to articulate our common human experience. But such is clearly not the position which Professor Connelly himself takes. Rather as his frequent appeals to such inner-theological expressions as the "inner word" of revelation, or Macquarrie's "participation" theme or Lonergan's yet more explicit insistence upon the theologian's need for "religious conversion," or his own occasional and still more explicit insistence upon sharing a Christian belief in order to interpret it properly—as all these factors seem to suggest, Professor Connelly demands that *in principle* not merely our common experience but Christian faith (and perhaps belief) is necessary for doing the scientific task of theology.

Please allow me to try to clarify my real puzzlement here. I do not question that most Christian theologians (myself included) as a matter of fact are also committed to an explicitly Christian faith stance, committed indeed usually even to a particular set of doctrinal beliefs. I do seriously question whether *any in principle* argument can legitimately be made for that observation. Yet precisely this distinction between a matter of principle and a matter of fact is of no little moment for a clarification of the nature of theology as a *scientific* discipline. If I understand him correctly, Professor Connelly is committed to the position that *in principle* Christian theology *must be both* scientific and expressive of the personal faith stance (and perhaps beliefs) of the theologian. I have tried to suggest above why I do not believe that the logic of his own general theological model need lead to that conclusion.

Rather could one not say that as a matter of sociological fact, it is true that most Christian theologians are also Christian believers but as a matter of methodological principle such explicit faith is not required. As suggested above, that faith is not required by the logic of the commitment to common human experience as the latter functions in providing the experiential element providing the pre-understanding needed to interpret religious texts. Moreover, not only does the logic of Professor Connelly's commitment to common human experience not require an explicitly Christian faith to interpret Christian texts but the logic of Professor Connelly's even firmer commitment to the authentically scientific status of theology seems to militate against his insistence upon the methodological necessity of personal Christian faith for the Christian theologian. For it would seem that the theologian must pay too heavy a price if he elevates a sociological fact to the level of a methodological principle. That price seems clear: viz. that any claim by theology to being a scientific discipline in any ordinary sense of the meaning of science is rendered, at best, suspect. For any scientific discipline, to my knowledge at least, always claims that its mode of argumentation, its criteria, its evidence, its warrants, its methods are available for public investigation. In principle, for a scientific discipline, there can not be special claims to merely personal (or communal) experiences or merely private languages i.e. to experiences that, in principle, cannot be tested, whether that testing be experimental, historical, social-scientific, hermeneutical or philosophical. Rather—again in principle—any interpretation of the Christian tradition or of our common human experience is open to investigation by any competent practitioner of the discipline being employed (e.g. history, hermeneutics, philosophy, etc.).

To summarize here: the basic differentiation is between a distinction in principle and a distinction in fact. In principle, Professor Connelly holds, the theologian qua theologian must possess explicit Christian faith. In fact, I hold, I and most theologians I know or read are indeed explicitly committed to Christianity. But in principle, that explicit commitment is not strictly necessary for one to perform the explicitly theological task, if the commitment to common human experience is taken with full seriousness; in principle, personal faith claims do not serve as authentic scientific and thereby scientific-theological warrants in theological argument. Parenthetically, it might be added

that in fact it would seem at least extremely difficult, not to say presumptuous, to find ways to test the presence or absence of the gift of faith among theological colleagues or students. Such are the major difficulties which I believe Professor Connelly's model for theology may involve.

I trust that it would not be out of place here to suggest an alternative model for theology which could be, if my former argument is at all correct, not merely a gratuitous alternative but faithful to the logic if not the conclusions of Professor Connelly's own model. On that alternative understanding, Christian theology as a scientific discipline (open in principle, therefore, to allow its cognitive, ethical and existential claims to meaning, meaningfulness and truth be tested by commonly shared modes of philosophical, hermeneutical, ethical and existential argumentation) may be understood as involved in two major tasks: first, a fundamental theology wherein its public criteria are explicated and defended; second, a doctrinal and systematic theology wherein its public criteria are employed to explicate the meaning, meaningfulness and truth (or, in principle, the reverse) of the major cognitive, ethical, aesthetic and existential claims of a particular church tradition.

Although the second task of dogmatic theology is not, I believe, to be simply an extension of fundamental theology, still the criteria established in fundamental theology will in fact be criteria employed to aid in the explication or articulation of the specific religious tradition in question. What Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ernst Troeltsch called a dogmatic theology as a *Glaubenslehre*, what H. R. Niebuhr called a confessional theology with an apologetic element, what Karl Rahner calls a transcendental-systematic theology as distinct from a formal-fundamental theology are indicative of what a *Christian dogmatics* attempts to achieve. The crucial factor, however, seems to be the theologian's earlier clarification of his own set of public criteria to investigate the claims to meaning, meaningfulness and truth of a particular religious tradition. In so far as such criteria are defensible in the wider scientific community, they are also applicable by and to the theological community as that community committed to investigating and explicating the claims to truth and meaning of a particular religious tradition. Just as the literary critic often is but need not be a creative poet himself in order to understand and judge a work of poetry, so too the theo-

gian often is but need not be a creative religious figure in order to understand, explicate and adjudicate an expression of the religious vision of reality. For myself, therefore, a Christian theology can be described as that intellectual discipline which correlates the meanings present in our common human experience and language and the meanings present in the Christian tradition. A Catholic dogmatic theology further specifies the Christian tradition as the explicitly Roman Catholic doctrinal, ethical, aesthetic and existential tradition while employing the same set of publicly available criteria. In the latter case, for example, not only is there not a difficulty in principle but I believe it can be shown that there is no difficulty in fact to explicate and defend on publicly available grounds the main principles—the sacramental principle, the doctrinal principle and the philosophical principle—which Professor Connelly himself admirably explicates as the major principles operative in Catholic Christianity. But whether or not such a claim can be upheld, the theologian's task, qua theologian, should not be identified with the religious task—more accurately, gift—of salvific faith. Now I realize that this alternative model has not been defended here at the length required but merely asserted. I have tried to provide such evidence elsewhere so that I trust you will pardon me with simply citing what I understand the major difficulties with Professor Connelly's own position to be while merely suggesting a constructive alternative I would myself propose as not merely a *theologia ex machina* but as, in fact, faithful to the logic though not the conclusions of Professor Connelly's own position.

For theology, I have come to believe, really is a work and not a faith. Indeed a full commitment to that differentiation can, I hope, both keep the theologian more modest about his own contribution to the life of the Church and the society and more able to perform that work which is his special vocation. By anyone's theology personal faith indeed personal holiness is qualitatively more important than theological expertise in exactly the same manner as a meaningful life is qualitatively more important than correct thoughts upon life. And yet—they also serve who only stand and wait—for the correct and publicly discussable meanings which their vocation as theologians may render available for their Church and their society. A Catholic *Glaubenslehre* seems to me both possible and appropriate for our theological community to

attempt at this time. As theologians, I have tried to suggest, our attempts should take the form of an alternative model to the traditional one which Professor Connelly has so accurately and so elegantly articulated for our Society's critical attention. If we all really agree with Professor Connelly and the Catholic tradition, as I do, that theology should be a scientific discipline then it seems time that we consider explicitly and systematically what that commitment might mean in our own time in terms of the criteria, the warrants and the backings for any genuinely theological statement. For the matter at issue in the route one takes in responding to Professor Connelly's forceful formulation of his questions is no less than that of the very criteria by means of which any one of us can make a statement that all of us can recognize as genuinely theological.

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