

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR COLLINS—II

In addressing the problem of how Christian moralists should employ the Scriptures, Professor Raymond Collins feels that by reversing the question and considering the ways in which the biblical authors treat ethical issues some light may be shed both on the factual pluralism of Catholic moral theology and on the larger question of a specifically Catholic or Christian ethic.

From his select study he concludes that: (1) the New Testament authors each consider ethical teaching an integral part of the gospel message; (2) an eclectic selection of ethical content from various sources makes for an openness and pluralism in New Testament ethics, impossible of reduction to any single ethical view; (3) formal norms predominate over concrete norms; (4) "agapeic love" is the single theme linking the authors' ethical teaching, however varied their approach to that theme; (5) these eclectic views are presented in a theological context which makes the ethic Christian even with its essentially secular content.

To stimulate discussion I would like to ask some further questions and present several points prompted by this fine paper.

First Professor Collins tells us that most ethicists find it easier to incorporate and utilize the data of the modern sciences than the insights of Scripture. The question of why this is so might be worth exploring. If James Gustafson's assessment of the complexity of the issues involved in the moralist's use of empirical studies is near the mark, then Collins' statement may not be an endorsement of this self-confidence.¹ If however moral theologians have developed a greater sophistication in correlating empirical science and moral theology than in their incorporation of scriptural data, they may be better equipped than some think to deal with the complex issues involved in the ethical use of the Scriptures. In either event the comparison puts our work

¹"The Relationship of Empirical Science to Moral Thought," in *CTSA Proceedings* 26 (1971), 122-37. See also Roderick Hindery, "Pluralism in Moral Theology," in *CTSA Proceedings* 28 (1973), 71-95.

here in a different context. Pluralism in all three areas is something of a common problem.

Secondly Professor Collins notes that the Bible does not address itself to the great ethical questions of modern man since they were unknown to the biblical authors. Now if Paul Tillich's method of correlation were invoked, namely the correlation between "questions" expressed in the contemporary situation with "answers" provided by the Christian message, then the problem takes a particularly crucial turn. If however David Tracy is correct in his assessment of the unacceptability of Tillich's formulation of the task of correlation,² then not only must modern "answers" be investigated critically but also "no one (not even a Christian theologian!) can decide that only the questions articulated by a particular form of contemporary thought are of theological concern."³ And if one considered Tracy's further claim that the theologian needs an explicitly transcendental or metaphysical mode of reflection for determining the truth-status of the fruits of one's investigations into common human experience and the Christian fact, then Professor Collins' concluding remarks about the impossibility of limiting the kingdom of God and man's response to it to *a priori* categories would likewise be put into a new and perhaps enlightening context.⁴

Thirdly a modest attempt will be made to outline a possible explanation of the openness and pluralism of New Testament ethical teaching which Professor Collins so ably describes. Utilization will be made of Bernard Lonergan's explanation of three sources of pluralism.⁵

The first source has its wellsprings in the undifferentiation of human consciousness and is termed the pluralism of common sense. Although the mind may well be the same for all men the techniques it uses vary considerably and are developed over time. We first notice the change that occurs when we as very little children began to grow up, when we began to speak. Until then we had been living in the world of immediacy, a small world whose contents were what we could see, feel,

²David Tracy, "The Task of Fundamental Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 54 (1974), 13-34.

³*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵*Doctrinal Pluralism*, pp. 33-9, 56-65; *Method in Theology*, pp. 276-81.

hear, taste, touch and smell. But with the advent of language we were entering a far larger world, mediating by meaning (by experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding), a world with a past, a present, and a future, all of which were far from limited by what we could ourselves immediately experience. Now for Lonergan the first stage of meaning in this more complicated world called the real one is just the realm of common sense, the realm of undifferentiated consciousness where one experiences, understands, judges, and decides but where one does not make a specialty or systematic and critical separation of any of these activities. For the realm of common sense is pragmatic; it asks no theoretical questions; its end is exclusively practical application. Common sense does not employ universal philosophical principles. It offers parables and proverbs, rich metaphors and allegories, rituals and narrative forms. It offers pieces of advice, some of them urgently needed, that ought to be born in mind if one is to live wisely. It does not employ syllogisms and even though it argues from analogy, its analogies are not those of logicians but rather the kinds of adaptations observed by Piaget.⁶

Each of us knows at least one brand of common sense. But there are as many brands as there are linguistic, social and cultural differences. For common sense is a specialization in the practical and each of us lives in a particular time and place where things have to be done and done well. This multiplicity of common sense realms is the first source of pluralism in general and in the Scriptures in particular. Primarily it is a pluralism of communications more than of doctrines.

To avoid oversimplification it should be noted that the more educated people in the Greco-Roman world were through their education at least familiar with some genuinely philosophical works, as contrasted with the common masses. So they could be familiar with logical principles and could make propositions objects for their reflection. Yet even these educated people were normally instances of undifferentiated consciousness.

The second source of pluralism is found in the varied differentiations of human consciousness which deal more effectively with such realms as common sense, theory, transcendence, the aesthetic, scholar-

⁶*Doctrinal Pluralism*, pp. 16-7.

ship and philosophical interiority. For our purposes two of these realms will be commented on.

First the realm of theory. This involves a differentiation of consciousness whereby one specializes in the pursuit of truth for its own sake, where one seeks an explanatory relationship of objects to one another; it is a movement from the *quoad nos* to the *quoad se*. Both common sense and theory deal with the real world but in different ways for the realm of theory is a specialization in the abstract and theoretical rather than in the concrete and practical. Its vague beginnings are observed in the New Testament data and become clearer in the Patristic period. But no consistent aim of universal systematization or significant success occur until the medieval period. The world mediated by meaning has split now into a realm of common sense and realm of theory. And the same man may live in one or both.

Secondly there is the realm of interiority. The systematic exigence which broke into the realm of common sense, if it was ever to be met, sooner or later reinforced the critical exigence. Are the common sense parables and "sayings of the Lord" just so much primitive data to be brushed aside once science has brought the dawn of intelligence and reason into the arena of moral concerns? Is there such a thing as real human knowing? "What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do it?"⁷ The third stage of meaning is reached by these concerns. It is the turn to interiority, subjectivity, a realm of meaning that is not present in the New Testament data but which, if absent from the moral theologian's world, may cause considerable problems. It aims at self-appropriation so that one is equipped with the tools for an analysis of common sense procedures and scientific ones as well.

If you add to these such realms as transcendence (the unrestricted demand for intelligibility, for the unconditioned, for a criterion of every finite good) and scholarship (the combination of the common sense of one's own time and place with a detailed understanding of the common sense of another time and place), then one has pointed out the second source of pluralism. Adding the combination of the realms of common sense and transcendence with the realm of incipient theory,

⁷*Method in Theology*, p. 83.

one may further explain the phenomena of pluralism so finely sketched by Professor Collins through the realm of scholarship.

It remains only to add Lonergan's third and far more radical source of pluralism, namely the presence or absence of religious, moral and intellectual conversion to complete our suggested explanation of the pluralism observed in the New Testament ethical reflections.⁸ Religious conversion for Lonergan is that radical horizon transformation of falling in love with God whereby a new basis is established for all valuing and all doing good. It is the gift of God's love, not man's achievement. Moral conversion is the transformation of the criteria of what we really want and really want to be. It is a shift from what is merely in some way satisfying to what is really worthwhile. And finally intellectual conversion is the radical elimination of some pervasive and persuasive myths about reality, objectivity, and human knowing. The degree to which religious conversion is absent is the degree to which abounds the pluralism of idols, religious aberrations to which the Scriptures devote considerable attention. In addition without moral conversion the Christian religion is distorted by sins. So we find in the Scriptures radical calls to flee from the pluralism of sin. And finally just as Christianity can be distorted by false gods and by sins, so too it can without intellectual conversion be bloated by the pluralism of errors. It should be noted also that although religious and moral conversion are at the heart of the Scriptures, yet the ambiguity of realism is not a revealed datum. So it was bound to take a long time for errors about the criteria for reality to be uncovered, mined and utilized.⁹

Let us conclude this all too brief consideration by suggesting some lessons resulting from Lonergan's analysis of pluralism. First if one is to study the pluralism of moral teaching of the Scriptures, he will have to know the brand of common sense that teaching is embedded in as well as his own brand of common sense in addition to realizing that "in undifferentiated consciousness coming to know does not occur apart from doing."¹⁰ Secondly regarding the pluralism involved in the

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 267-70.

⁹B. Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism," *Theology Digest* 20 (1972), 292-305.

¹⁰*Doctrinal Pluralism*, p. 60.

various differentiations of consciousness, "the only way to understand another's differentiation of consciousness is to bring about that differentiation in oneself."¹¹ Thirdly the real threat to the unity of the Christian community lies in the absence of the threefold conversion, religious, moral and intellectual. We are between a rock and a hard place "when persons with partially differentiated consciousness not only do not understand one another but also so extol system or method or scholarship or interiority or slightly advanced prayer as to set aside achievement and block development in the other four."¹²

This leads us to our final consideration. If the principal role of the Scriptures in Christian living is to bring about religious and moral conversion,¹³ then moral theology might do well to utilize the Scriptures by subjecting to critical scrutiny the conversion role of Scripture in enriching our moral lives lived within the Christian faith horizon. This use of Scripture involves a conception of moral theology in which there is a studied concentration on clarifying the subject pole of our horizon, namely the conscious human subject and the operations by which we evaluate data relevant to various moral concerns. This will involve an analysis of all the elements implicit in the dynamic exigence of our rational self-consciousness for consistency between knowing and doing in those who have come to know God as "Abba (Father)" in Jesus' dying and rising through the Spirit flooding their hearts.¹⁴

To stress the study of the conversion role of Scripture in Christian living for moral theology might hopefully bring about the following results. (1) It might bring together in a self-corrective process the two facets of privileged data of the Christian past and relevant data of the present. (2) It might eliminate the proof text approach by developing a horizon in which such an approach is simply beside the point. (3) It can provide more substantial grounds for the common assertion that biblical ethics is not Christian ethics. (4) It challenges the moral theologian to develop a higher synthesis than the mere espousal of traditional or

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹²*Method in Theology*, p. 330.

¹³See Quentin Quesnell, "Theological Method on the Scripture as Source," in *Foundations of Theology*, ed. by Philip McShane, pp. 162-93.

¹⁴B. Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 599.

modern causes by calling over and over for a more rigorous understanding of his own understanding, for a more reflective judging of his own judgments, and for a more deliberative deciding about decisions. (5) It may suggest that if religious and moral conversion are so basic both to Christian living and Christian moral theology, intellectual conversion may be no less so. For as we have seen just as religion is corrupted by idols and morality by sins, so are both undermined by errors.

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