

THEOLOGY IN THE SEMINARY CONTEXT

SCOPE AND METHOD IN FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGY: EXPLORATION OF A CONTEMPORARY MODEL

Presenter: M. John Farrelly, De Sales School of Theology
Respondents: Peter C. Phan, The Catholic University of America
Thomas G. Guarino, Seton Hall University

Farrelly located his presentation within an integrative interpretation of foundational theology which has three parts. The first two critically evaluate the meaning and grounds for belief in God, and meaning and grounds for faith in God specifically through Jesus Christ; the third examines the norm of faith and the nature of theology. Farrelly addressed the first part, the question of faith in God, in the four central theses of his recent work *Belief in God in Our Time: Foundational Theology, I* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992).

First, the major problem with faith today is a practical and at times theoretical modern historical consciousness that is naturalistic, in the sense that people, either optimistically or pessimistically, tend to act as if the central meaning of life is contained within history, and the resources and knowledge operative in it are natural and limited to time and space. Second, to address the problem of belief today, we must first help human beings to appropriate their transcendence in values and knowledge, and then critically evaluate intimations of God available to them by their human experience. This may be done by employing a phenomenology that starts from modern historical experience. Third, the cosmological and anthropological testimonies about God elicited by the employment of such a phenomenology do not formally depend on Judeo-Christian revelation. Fourth, faith in a personal transcendent God who is acting in the world is not only vindicated; it is essential if life is to have meaning in our age of historical consciousness.

In his response, Phan asserted that the most distinctive characteristic of Farrelly's contribution is the catholicity of his approach, that his methodology and substantive positions attempt to maintain an inclusive both/and rather than and exclusive either/or approach. For example, Farrelly argues that both reasoning and emotions are involved in the search for meaning and truth and that there is a need of going beyond disciplines such as psychology and sociology to metaphysical reflections on the existence of an absolute dimension of being, value, and good that is the deepest dimension of what it means to be human.

Phan commends as courageous and opportune Farrelly's unabashed reliance on philosophy in the face of current antimetaphysical trends both in deconstructionist philosophies and in antifoundationalist theologies. However, he questions, for both pedagogical and substantive reasons, the separation of the treatment of belief in God and belief in the Christian God.

In his critique, Guarino pointed out the major ontological presuppositions to which Farrelly alludes in his work but does not develop at length, that is, the realist view of the unity and universality of human nature. After reflecting on the impact of postmodern nonfoundationalism on fundamental theology, Guarino notes that Farrelly's project is opposed by several strong epistemological currents today, and he raises several questions about foundational theology relevant to issues raised by Farrelly.

Discussion participants raised the pedagogical issue of where to locate the study of foundational theology in a specifically seminary curriculum, noting that, in most cases, it is not an issue personally engaged by the students. Nor is it provoked by external forces usually until they have had theological reflection on pastoral experience with disaffected believers who have left the church to find God.

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THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

IN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Panelists: Mary Aquin O'Neill, Mt. St. Agnes Theological Center for Women
William M. Thompson, Duquesne University

The discussion focused on the anthropological problems raised in speaking of women as in the image of Christ. In an article forthcoming in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* ("Women and 'Conformity to Christ's Image': The Challenge of Avoiding Docetism and Affirming Inclusivism"), Thompson criticizes a contemporary form of docetism that preserves belief in women as images of Christ at the expense of the reality of Jesus' humanity, especially his maleness. To departicularize Jesus' humanity, Thompson argues, is akin to "neu-