

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

- Topic: Is Metaphysics Relevant for Contemporary Theology?
Convener: James Le Grys, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
Presenter: Oliva Blanchette, Boston College
Respondents: Paul Lakeland, Fairfield University
David L. Schindler, John Paul II Institute
for Studies on Marriage and Family

The aim of this session was to pose the question of a continuing role for metaphysics in contemporary theology. The focus of the session was a presentation by Oliva Blanchette, whose forthcoming book on metaphysics, *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*, is scheduled to appear in a few months. Blanchette argued that metaphysics is not only relevant for theology, but is in fact necessary for advancing theology as a discipline.

Blanchette began by arguing that metaphysics is essential to the task of philosophy. Prior to metaphysics, rational inquiry in the particular sciences and in phenomenology focuses on one or another aspect of being, but always presupposes being, without ever focusing on being simply as being. What is only a matter of faith in the other sciences becomes a matter of rational inquiry in metaphysics, the universal science of being simply as being. After running through the course of its own questions about being as the universe in which we find ourselves, metaphysics ends up having to raise another kind of question, that of a totally transcendent universal cause of being as being in its universal dimension. Thus at the end of metaphysics the question of God has to be raised just as the question of being itself as being has to be raised at the end of the particular sciences and phenomenology.

Metaphysics opens the way for another kind of rational investigation, one that has God as its subject matter (theology), because when it comes to an end of what it can inquire into it shows that another kind of question has to arise that it cannot entirely enter into. Metaphysics, however, does not provide a natural theology except in a negative sense, for what is proved at the end of metaphysics is not only that God exists but that God is totally other than anything that can come into our initial conception of being.

Blanchette argued that this further rational investigation into God that is theology needs to take up the reasoning that has already taken place in metaphysics and appropriate it if theology is to make progress in terms of coming to a fuller understanding of what God has revealed. Every theologian necessarily works within some metaphysical framework, whether consciously or not. To gain this fuller understanding, however, the theologian cannot simply transfer concepts from one order of questioning (philosophy) to another (theology), but must enter into the order of questioning that is proper to

philosophy in order to show how it makes the order of questioning in theology more manifest.

The first respondent, Paul Lakeland, questioned whether Blanchette's rather classical definition of theology is adequate for contemporary theology, which includes various forms of theology such as liberation and correlational theology. Contemporary Christian theology is not primarily rational discourse about God, but rather an intellectual exploration of the meaning of faith in the present moment of history. Because theology attends more to the act of faith in history than it does to the essence of the divine, the social sciences, politics and history, even literature and the arts are as important as philosophy to the work of the theologian. Moreover, any philosophy that is blind to its own historical and linguistic conditioning will be suspect for contemporary theologians.

The second respondent, David Schindler, thought that in the contemporary context more should be said about a practical as opposed to a theoretical denial of the possibility and/or legitimacy of metaphysics. Drawing on ideas from both Gilson and Blondel, he argued that one can show that the relevant point is not *whether* a metaphysics will inform and/or guide one's practice but whether this *de facto* operative metaphysics will remain unconscious or conscious. Schindler also contended that some kind of implicit faith is integral to all acts of knowing, including the metaphysical, and that, since the transcendence and immanence of *esse* imply one another, natural theology is just so far never merely negative theology.

JAMES LE GRYS

*U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
Washington, D.C.*

+ + +

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY ISSUES

Topic: Contemporary Theology on Marriage and Family Issues
 Convener: Julie Hanlon Rubio, St. Louis University
 Presenters: Thomas Kelly, Creighton University
 Julie Hanlon Rubio, St. Louis University
 William P. Roberts, University of Dayton

The Second Vatican Council read the signs of the times in the early 1960s when it realized that what married couples understood and experienced within marriage was quite different than the definition of marriage given in the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Accordingly, the Bishops of that council stopped talking about marriage as a contract and began to speak of it as a covenant, "an intimate partnership of life of love." Since that time, both the Magisterium and Catholic lay theologians have paid much greater attention to marriage and family issues, developing what might be called a theology of the family. The purpose of this