

formulation of doctrine, I would like to have seen some mention of the “defensive” character of dogmatic statements as well as the ecumenical problems associated with doctrinal development. Madges is right to emphasize that “at the root of most doctrines is an experience” (314), but here is a place where experience tells me students want to know more. The omission may be due to the fact that Madges’ discussion of fundamental theology concentrates mainly on the question of God and does not entirely make clear that one’s valuation of experience (as a locus of God’s revelation) is also a “fundamental theological” question. Some discussion of “revelation” (perhaps models of revelation) would give students a way of understanding why there can be different understandings of theological method and of doctrinal development. Here one could link up again to the “uniqueness of Jesus” models presented by Knitter in Chapter Seven, since that is really the same issue. Madges distinguishes between the classicist and historically conscious approaches to truth but I have found, particularly with Catholic students, the need to address this issue in greater detail than he. Introducing the concept of the “hierarchy of truths” can prove helpful.

Like many of us who teach introductory courses in theology and religious studies, Hill, Knitter, and Madges have long been in pursuit of the “holy grail” of a suitable text. While they make no Indiana Jones-like claims that *Faith, Religion & Theology* represents “the last crusade” in this regard, they have succeeded admirably. So well, in my estimation, that I will definitely use it in my own next attempt at the introductory course.

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AUTHORS’ RESPONSE

The following response to our four friendly but challenging reviewers follows the same process and format used in our book. The three of us sat down to determine, first, the issues to be dealt with and then, who would do what. After Denise Lardner Carmody’s concise and complete summary of our book’s contents and intents, the concerns seemed to fall into three broad categories: (1) The insider-outsider problematic (Barnes); (2) the place of theology in a religiously affiliated university and the roles of spirituality and worship in such a theology (Cunningham); and (3) concerns about our overall method, together with the limitations on such a method resulting from the white, Catholic, middle-class, maleness of all three authors (Carmody and Hinsdale). Paul Knitter responds to the first issue; William Madges to the second, and Brennan Hill to the third. Though each speaks for himself, we all reviewed and approved the composite response. As is evident, just as the

broad issue of theology vs. religious studies overlaps in the critiques, so does it in our responses.

1.

In trying to formulate an answer to Michael Barnes's "insider/outsider" question, the three of us found ourselves reviewing and reaffirming the history of our book. His concern, reflected in questions raised by other reviewers about the "floating" or "tension" between theology and religious studies, points to the very problem that gave rise, back in 1975, to Xavier University's "Introduction to Theology" course, and eventually to our textbook. "Theology 111" was the communal attempt of our Theology Department to resolve the then existing "insider/outsider" tension (though at the time we did not use such language). The "outsiders" in the Department who have been attempting an academic, non-valuative method for introducing students to the world of religion/theology found their students responding with either benign disengagement or soporific confusion. The "insiders," who saw the introductory course primarily as a pastoral or catechetical tool, faced student accusations of proselytizing or of requiring religious faith in the classroom when we did not require it in accepting their tuition. Theology at Xavier in the early 1970s was, in the view of many, in a state of disarray. Something had to be done.

"Theology 111" was the result. And *Faith, Religion, & Theology* has attempted to gather the fruits of that course over the past decade and a half. Barnes's questions help us identify what we have been about. Yet, ours is primarily an insider's approach. We found that, given the kind of students we are dealing with in the kind of institution we are, a purely academic approach did not work. Besides, we had also learned from the classical hermeneuts of suspicion (Nietzsche, Freud, Marx) and from feminist voices that every objective "outsider perspective" always has an ideological "insider agenda." So we decided to be honest about our agenda and more responsive to the needs of our students. We began to take an insider's approach—one that seeks to work with personal experience; one that raises questions of value and calls for decisions; and, yes, one that works with the Christian commitment or context that marks the experience of us authors and most of our students.

We have therefore not tried to camouflage the religious tradition or perspective that grounds our text: what Barnes calls "a liberal and socially active Catholicism" (although, instead of using the "L word," we would prefer to call it a "post-Vatican II Catholicism"). We have tried to do this in a way in which students will realize that to view the world from such a perspective neither apodictically *excludes* nor surreptitiously *includes* other perspectives. We have tried to advocate a particular religious perspective in a genuinely *pluralistic* manner. We have at

the same time tried to take our positions in a way that neither misprizes other views nor subordinates them to our own but, rather, in a way that seeks to facilitate a conversation between our views and those of others.

We have, in other words, attempted to take an insider-approach that is essentially and paradoxically open to the outside. This is what makes the pivotal difference, we hope, between our book and previous, proselytizing insider-approaches. With Luther, we clearly announce, "Here we stand" (i.e., with "liberal, socially minded Christians"); but we also recognize that there are other places to stand, that we must be open to those other places, and that we ourselves *might* be standing somewhere else in the future. Such an approach, we have found, can be both informative and engaging also for "atheists or Buddhists or [the] just plain puzzled."

To locate the approach we take in this text within contemporary discussion about theological method, we feel that it represents one way of responding, in the undergraduate classroom, to what Mark Kline Taylor has called the "postmodern trilemma." If theology is to speak meaningfully and morally to the postmodern consciousness of North America (which also affects college students), Taylor maintains, it will have to blend and balance three ingredients: tradition, pluralism, and resistance to oppression.¹ Our postmodern awareness, chastened by Enlightenment excesses, recognizes the necessity of acknowledging and preserving our own roots. Tradition, for all its limitations, is not a prison but a life-giving source that has to be maintained and renewed. Thus, especially in Parts One and Three, we have consciously recognized Christianity as the tradition in which we stand and which we try to interpret.

At the same time, postmodern awareness acknowledges and even celebrates *pluralism*. While we affirm our own tradition, we realize that it is neither the *only* nor the *absolute* tradition. Because there are other traditions and because none of them is absolute, the journey toward truth must proceed by way of *conversation*. Every one needs the many others. Thus, although we cannot forget that our own tradition is our home, we have to venture out of our own neighborhood to meet the many others. Only within this conversation or encounter of the many, not outside it, can theology carry on its interpretative task. This we have tried to recognize especially in Part Two, where we affirm and take the first steps to engage other religious and ideological perspectives.

But when we venture out of our own tradition, we find not just diversity but also *domination and oppression*—needless human and ecological suffering. This third horn of the postmodern trilemma, perhaps more urgently than the others, demands our theological

¹Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), chap. 1.

response—one that will lead not just to understanding but to resistance. In view of the domination that is sapping the lives of peoples and of the planet, we must relate our affirmation of tradition and our conversation with others to such realities as starvation and sexism and death squads and a diminishing ozone layer. This concern for human and ecological liberation is found in all three parts of our text.

The postmodern trilemma, therefore, demands that theologians and their students be “insiders” and “outsiders” and “liberators.” To introduce our students to that complex but exciting blend was the ideal of our text. Our critics have enabled us both to reaffirm the validity of that ideal and to recognize where our efforts to realize it have limped or lagged. For this we are grateful.

2.

In their critiques of our book, both Michael Barnes and Lawrence Cunningham have raised the question about the way religion or theology ought to be presented at religiously affiliated universities. Both readers rightly see that our book does not offer the chimera of “pure objectivity” nor does it present all the possible religious or even Christian alternatives to our theological perspective. Is our approach defensible? I think that it is on at least two counts. First, taking some stance is unavoidable; even in presumably academically dispassionate books, the selection and presentation of material is guided by a perspective. The difference in the case of our book is that our perspective is clearly identified rather than covertly operative.

Second, a committed theological approach rather than a purely academic and detached one is particularly appropriate in religiously affiliated colleges. Our institution is an example. Although the student population at Xavier University, Cincinnati has become increasingly diverse religiously over the past few decades, the overwhelming majority of our students come from Catholic backgrounds. Insofar as theology (conceived as critical reflection on a religious tradition) contributes to a truly liberal education, our university has an obligation to encourage *all* its students to reflect critically on the faith they have chosen or inherited, but it has a special obligation to its Catholic students to promote serious reflection on the Catholic faith. The same is true for other religiously affiliated colleges and universities; they have a special obligation to their primary constituency. To answer Cunningham’s question: yes, theology at religiously affiliated colleges is ultimately faith seeking understanding. Yes, those who teach theology at such institutions have the responsibility to show their students that the study of theology may have pertinence to their lives as Christians (or Jews, or Muslims, depending on the religious affiliation of the institution).

But we must say more. A committed approach to theology does not necessarily entail uncritical apologetics nor need it be reduced to spiritual formation. The *fides quaerens intellectum* approach to theology requires *intellectus*. And understanding entails asking serious questions, probing the viability of past interpretations of faith, and examining the relation of one's faith to the major social and political issues of the day. As the U.S. Catholic bishops stated in their 1980 Pastoral Letter on Catholic Higher Education: "Theology is not the same as faith or spirituality or holiness." Theology must be taught "in appropriate *academic* fashion," but with an eye to encouraging students "to cope with their personal problems of faith and to consider the religious dimensions of the major issues in our contemporary culture and society."²

We would also like to respond to Cunningham's observation that spirituality is either misplaced or not properly conceived in our book. He complains that we treat spirituality explicitly only under the personal appropriation of faith (Part One of the book), whereas he believes it should be the overarching perspective from which the entire book is written. Cunningham agrees with Sandra Schneiders that spirituality is not a subset of theology, but an autonomous discipline that is interested in spiritual experience "as experience, i.e., in its phenomenological wholeness."³ This conception of spirituality as a *discipline* requires the utilization of psychology, comparative religion, anthropology, and other disciplines in order accurately to describe and to understand spiritual experiences. To write our book from this perspective would probably have yielded an interesting introduction to the varieties of religious experience, but it would have significantly altered the rich picture of Christian *theology* we wanted to offer our students. We intended our text to introduce students to theology, which of course meant explaining its interconnections with faith, spirituality, and religion. We did not, however, intend our text to be primarily an introduction to spirituality.⁴

Cunningham makes the related criticism that liturgy and worship are not explicitly treated in our book. He seems to imply that this is another indication of the way in which we have not properly dealt with spirituality. Although not given a separate heading in any section of the

²U. S. Catholic Conference, *Catholic Higher Education and the Pastoral Mission of the Church* (Washington, DC: 1981), 5.

³Sandra M. Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 692.

⁴Note the difference of Walter Principe's position on this point from Schneiders' and, presumably, Cunningham's. Principe points out that a theological approach to spiritual experiences involves assessment according to theological principles, whereas a religious studies approach to such experiences is content with a descriptive analysis (Walter Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality," *Studies in Religion* 12 [1983]: 139-40).

book, liturgy and worship are not absent from our text. They are discussed as a fundamental dimension of religion (175-76), as a *locus*—in the Christian context—for experiencing the meaning of Jesus' resurrection (303-04), and as a constitutive element in the formation of Christian doctrines (312-13). In retrospect, liturgical worship probably should have been given more extensive treatment. Why did we not think to do that? One reason is that we presupposed that most of our students already had considerable experience of this aspect of the Christian tradition, and we wanted to introduce them to other areas of life in which spiritual experiences are possible. Moreover, many of our students complain that liturgy is not meaningful or relevant to their lives and say that they have stopped going to Mass. Giving extended treatment to this topic, therefore, did not seem to be a wise move. Only worship experiences that awaken students to the importance of religion in their lives can do that. We attempted to convey the vitality of religion through getting them to *think* about it in the case of Christianity, through a theology of action.

Does the modest treatment of liturgy and worship in the book mean that we are not interested in spirituality? Not at all. There is a spirituality implicitly, yet clearly, evident throughout the book. This spirituality is rooted in the Christian faith experience and oriented toward praxis in the world. As Schneiders and others have pointed out, the term "spirituality" no longer refers "exclusively or even primarily to prayer and spiritual exercises, much less to an elite state or superior practice of Christianity," but has "broadened to connote the whole of the life of faith and even the life of the person as a whole, including its bodily, psychological, social, and political dimensions."⁵ Our presentation of faith in its physical, imaginative, and active dimensions (12-29), our emphasis upon the social value of religion (142-50), our exploration of feminism and its emphasis upon wholeness and integration (331-40), and our attention to liberation theology (343-58) reflect this holistic understanding of spirituality. It is a conception of spirituality that rejects the dichotomy between spirit and body and retrieves the authentically Pauline conception, according to which the spiritual life is that life which is guided by the Spirit of God. Although we have not written our book from the perspective of spirituality conceived as a *discipline*, we have written it from a perspective that is concerned with spirituality conceived as the *experience* of integration and self-transcendence.⁶

⁵Schneiders, 679.

⁶Schneiders, 684, defines spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." And Principe, 139, says that spirituality "points to those aspects of a person's living a faith or commitment that concern his or her striving to attain the highest ideal or goal."

3.

Denise Lardner Carmody's observation that our book "floats" between religious studies and theology, and thus turns out to be somewhat of a "hybrid" approach to the introductory course zeros in on one of the dilemmas we faced in writing the book. It is a dilemma, we suspect, encountered by many others preparing an introductory course in church-affiliated colleges and universities. On the one hand, we did not want to limit ourselves to introducing our students to various theological approaches, because many of our students are neither prepared for nor interested in theological reflection as they begin their first college course in religion. At the same time, we did not want simply to offer an objective and content-centered presentation of various religious traditions. It is our conviction that such an approach would not adequately meet the needs of our students, many of whom sign up for theology courses, at least in part, to clarify their own religious perspectives and to listen to the points of view of others in an open and free atmosphere.

We attempted to deal with both the subjective and objective needs of our students by distinguishing among faith, religion, and theology. We began with faith because we have observed that most of our students have some level of religious faith and can thus more comfortably begin the course by reflecting on their own experience. Granted, we largely focused on Christian faith, but we attempted also to include human faith, although that was admittedly not developed in any great detail. We mainly offered the Christian perspective because it is ours. Yet we tried not to promote this point of view, but rather to offer it as a backdrop for open and critical discussion.

Religion was presented next so that we might honestly address the students' various objections to organized religion, deal with possible advantages of organized religion, and introduce the students to the beliefs of religions other than Christian. And, finally, we ended with theology because we thought that by this time in the course the students might be better prepared to do some serious thinking about scripture and tradition, be more ready to apply their convictions to contemporary issues, and perhaps be willing to carry these convictions into action. As an introductory text, the book might well be called hybrid because it attempts to be scientific yet pastoral; objective yet willing to take positions; and inclusive yet committed to specific convictions.

Mary Ann Hinsdale's observations on supplementing the text in the areas of female development and race and class were pertinent and much appreciated. We are in complete agreement with her observation that our book, like all such texts, should be used with some supplementation and qualification. As educators, we did not set out to create a text that would teach students "what to think," but to offer a resource that would "get them thinking." Consequently, we present our points of

view, as well as the observations of many religious thinkers, in order to open up the religious horizons of the students, stimulate respectful exchange among those in the classes, and assist all in clarifying their religious thinking and living. The resources available always include much more than the text and go well beyond the supplemental materials that can be incorporated. These resources encompass all the insights and experiences of those in the room, as well as that indefinable “end product” that seems to exist when a course has been “good.”

Specific supplemental material should be added in the area of female human development and growth in faith, for these are crucial areas. They need to be dealt with in more depth and nuance than exists in Part One of our text. Perhaps the further treatment of women’s experience in Part Three will stimulate more detailed treatment of these issues.

It is true that, while our text attempts to be sensitive to social justice, the student voices heard throughout do not reflect a wide range of racial and class backgrounds. This reflects the limitations of our classroom situations, where because of a non-aggressive admissions policy and prohibitive fees the voices of color and the struggles of the poor are seldom heard “in person.” We have tried to remedy this somewhat by offering our students opportunities to do projects during the course wherein they tutor inner-city youngsters, assist in providing shelter for the homeless, or act as servers in local soup kitchens. These projects have had amazing results in breaking down stereotypes, in opening communication between our students and types of people they seldom have the opportunity to meet—as well as giving the “voices” seldom heard in our classrooms a chance to be heard.

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