

Talk Talk

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Sic et Non: A Response to Weis  
by Gary E. Gorman

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The recent comments by Mr. Weis on the theological communication raise at least two basic issues; 1) the nature of the theological enterprise, and 2) the function of religious language.

1. Sic: On the nature of the theological enterprise we must agree with the point which Weis seems to make; viz., dogmatic theology as an organized presentation of the dogmas of the Church is comprehended by only a small elite, the members of which talk among themselves and do not contribute significantly to the yeasty ferment among the "grass roots." A Gerhard or a Calvin, for example, may thoroughly and precisely organize the Reformation doctrines and confessions into a beautifully comprehensive theological system. However, such a system (whether by Gerhard or a modern) carries little meaning for ordinary Christian believers, for it depends on the existence of given dogmas and upon the acceptance of a general philosophical framework as well as on the presupposition of

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The following is a parody on "The Lament of the  
Wife of a Motivationalist." It may suitably be entitled:

"The Lament of a CPE Trained Seminarian"

I never get mad- I get hostile;  
I never feel sad, I'm depressed;  
If I read or I write and then see the light  
I'm not intelligent - I'm merely obsessed.

I never regret, I feel guilty;  
And if I should study my haul  
Do theology and such and not mind it too much  
Am I studious? Compulsive is all.

If I don't like the stole I have conflicts  
With a bivalent feelings toward the fringe.  
I never get carried or nervous or hurried  
Just anxious, and go on a binge.

If I'm happy I must be euphoric.  
If I go to the Pub for a Schmidt's  
And spend my time with the Psalms or some rhyme,  
I'm a manic and maybe a schiz.

If I tell them they're right I'm submissive,  
Repressing aggressiveness too,  
When I disagree, I'm defensive you see  
and projecting my symptoms on you.

I love Sem, but that's just transference,  
with "Old Martin" kicking his heels.  
My bitching and moaning is not simply moaning,  
the Field Office made some more "deals."

I'm not lonely, I'm simply dependent;  
My twitching is only a tic.  
If I seem a cad, never mind, just be glad  
That I'm a seminarian and not just sick.

P.S. Think about it.

David Gleason

STORY LIGHT, or, YOU COULD TOO, JOHNNY M'GILL

It was a blustery March day, so you can see why Skinny Billy closed the books down at Schramm & Rugh's, where he was a valued member of the committee probing "Wither Blackboards?", the committee that asks the question, "Is the blackboard a useful tool of communication in the XX. Century?" Skinny Billy had definitely decided not to eat at Sardi's, where, he had read in Town & Country, the red lady who burped before dessert was still lurking "among the tapestries", as it were. So Skinny Billy were/was! on the way home, and happened to see Smitty and The Wife sitting on The Porch, So they all started talking about the economic lag in the fourth quarter, which Skinny Billy would've enjoyed, had not his old friend, D. Gemeinde, come along with "Hi, you old turtle.' Ain't they nung you yet?" Not only that, but then Hi came out with, "Skinny Billy! I ain't seen you in a long time! Waja do? Washyer face?!" At this point Skinny Billy was probably depressed. Anyw y, he went home to E. Fred, home to his tiny place in the Village.

But, lo! Even E. Fred was little or no help. One never quite knows. E. Fred defenately did have a catty smile on his puss, and a "go fly yourself" mien, which was pretty mean. Especially in kinny Billy's sad and lost wandering f r from the ....oh, cut that out! So Skinny Billy did go fly himself. I mean, like, what else would you do? If the fortunes of life and exigencies of the situation had.... oh, I've got to stop that! Sorry.

Anyway, he first climbed into his Kilt (Hay'of Hayfield, which is not too far from the rye'ield). Then he got a medium-weight rope (one can't be too careful) and f'und a stout pole (yes! Let the reader understand.) He tied the rope to the pole, or the pole to the rope, and the rope unto himself, and, taking up his bar of soap, in case it rained, he set sail (sale?). Now, at last report,

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skinny Billy was seen somewhere over wather Old Orchard Beach, Maine, or the Isle of Skye, so, sometimes you can almost never tell.

-Ted N. McGill, who is definitely not skinny Billy so you better look for another.

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Quotations to keep handy (submitted by William Ritter) from a biography of Alfred North Whitehead: mathematician, philosopher, father of process theology... "Whitehead attended church with fair regularity; it is said that he went to a so-called 'high' parish, amusing evidence for which is found in Process and Reality, where he mentions incense as a typical 'religious' symbol, evocative of feeling tones which mysteriously communicate profound truth." from Annenberg's Jesus-God and Man... "Here we have to recognize an element of truth in the Roman veneration of Mary... Mary can be the symbol of humanity receiving the grace of God in faith... The relation of the church to God can at most be symbolized by means of an individual person in the figure of Mary."

from Tillich's Chicago lectures... "(attacking organized religion) simply shows lack of thought, and is usually rooted in bad experiences in childhood or more likely in Sunday School, which is one of the great laboratories in which Christian faith is expelled from children."

From Macquarrie's Principles of Christian Theology: "The priestly type of religion in the Old Testament differs from the prophetic type precisely in asserting that something needs to be done for man, something he is powerless to do for himself in response to the demands of God upon him. Even if priestly religion often fell into super-

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stitution and deserved the strictures of the prophets, it nevertheless held to a truth which the prophets overlooked."

So much for modern theology; on your way to Rome be sure to turn and genuflect to the old rugged cross as you leave the church in the dale.

Bill Ritter

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Points to ponder from Harvey Cox's Festival of Fools

p. 40 "Our censors snip the sex scenes out of Swedish movies while their censors cut the violent ones out of ours."

p. 59 "Fantasy is the richest source of human creativity. Theologically speaking, it is the image of the Creator God in man. Like God, man in fantasy creates whole worlds ex nihilo, out of nothing."

p. 64 "Man's openness to a really new future is dependent on his capacity for fantasy. Fantasy thrives among the dissatisfied. This suggests that insight into the future and willingness to move forward may require an element of alienation from our present society. Could this be why Jesus insisted that only the poor and disenherited could really grasp the Kingdom of God?"

pp. 92-93 "The search for the 'transcendence' is not dead today. It takes the form of the quest for the livelier, more just, more satisfying, and gentler forms of human community. It continues that seeking after the ever future Kingdom that Jesus commenced.

p. 95 "The church more often than not uses the memories of the saints not to encourage us in creativity but to bludgeon us into conformity. It has emptied the gestures of celebration until they have become barren and joyless. It has discouraged radical fantasy as possible threat to its hard-won place in Caesar's society."

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p. 111 "The 'angels and Archangels' symbolize poetically those marvelous dimensions of reality we touch only in celebration and fantasy. The 'company of heaven' linked to those of us on earth suggests that very large inclusive human community of which I become conscious part in celebration."

p. 140 "In the biblical portrait of Christ there are elements that can easily suggest clown symbols. Like the jester, Christ defies custom and scorns crowned heads. Like a wandering troubador he has no place to lay his head. Like the clown in the circus parade, he satirizes existing authority by riding into town replete with royal pageantry when he has no earthly power. Like a minstrel he frequents dinners and parties. At the end he is costumed by his enemies in a mocking caricature of royal paraphernalia. He is crucified amidst sniggers and taunts with a sign over his head that lampoons his laughable claim."

submitted by Kenneth Milston

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a unified society (Christendom). The vital question then becomes whether such an ethos is still with us and whether, in fact, faith is speaking to faith or simply to an echoing void.

If we may assume that we are post-enlightenment and post-christendom beings, then it seems safe to say that we no longer take dogma and confession for granted. As Christians, what is our task in this situation? Here, it seems, the way is open for a systematic (or even an existential) theology as opposed to a dogmatic theology—open, that is, to a theology that is essentially apologetic rather than largely kerygmatic. Might we not attempt in such a theology to combine the subjective experiences of men with the objective aspect of theology? In other words, might we not make others aware of the Christian message

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by raising the questions of man against the backdrop of Christian kerygma and thereby supplying the answers which we all seek? In this way we might at least provide some needed answers in an intelligible way, which is a marked contrast to the use of time-worn dogmatic responses that are not absorbed but merely reverberate through time.

2. Non: Mr. Reis also suggests that the philosophical aspect of "God-talk" has questionable value. That is, he fulminates against the careful precision paid to philosophical concepts and linguistic formulae within the theological discipline. However, it seems to us that philosophy is a natural adjunct to the biblical and historical aspects of the theological enterprise. That is to say, philosophical analysis includes all language, religious or otherwise. Philosophy is concerned, therefore, about the many uses of individual words in religious (theological) discourse that are essentially misuses, that do not communicate the desired information at all. For instance, were we to accept the idea of an anthropomorphic God, then we could easily talk of God in language derived from our own experience. Unfortunately, however, our God is a transcendent reality, and this places him beyond our experience and to some extent beyond our abilities of expression. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult to positively characterize or describe God. One alternative is to follow the Hamilton-Altizer school and proclaim the "death of God," which like all moratoria merely prolongs the resolution of the conflict. The problem is not thereby resolved, for we as Christians are bound continually to urge men to accept belief in God. Here the philosophical analyst steps in and says that it is nonsensical to request acceptance of a belief before the content of the belief is made clear. He reminds us that the meaning of a belief logically precedes the acceptance of it. The belief must first be clarified;

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then we can legitimately request acceptance - or rejection - of it.

Thus it seems that issues (such as the nature of God) raised by the philosopher are of basic concern to the religious believer; they are not mere academic issues but rather expose some of the deepest longings and questions of our day. While the ordinary religious believer may not be totally concerned about the confusion of religious language, religious scholars are and want to know (as one puts it) "whether Christian faith is the result of talking oneself out of anxiety by the entertainment of unreal supposition, or whether something that is true is claimed and can be meaningfully supported as true in the thought, worship, and practice of a Christian."

So the philosopher and the theologian continue to use esoteric and exact terminology in an attempt to clarify the Christian faith. When less trained minds come into contact with such language, there is a barrier preventing understanding. And here, painful though it may be, is where the ordinary padre finds a role. Part of one's priestly and/or pastoral function is to relate to the parishoner what the theologian is saying. Each minister is called on to be a theologian and interpreter in his own right, to restate what the gospel (in its biblical, historical or philosophical manifestation really means). And this is precisely where the issue falls into our laps. For too many clergymen the task seems too troublesome, so they fall back on a simplistic and untrue message about "sweet Jesus" and the bosom of Abraham." Are we willing to pass on this message, or have we the stamina and insight to interpret the true message? Unfortunately, all indications point to the former.

G.E.Gorman