



*I will ask questions, and you shall answer.*

*~God (Job 38:3)*

## 9. Theologies in Relation

With a sense of the meanings of religion and ideology, with a provisional working definition of theology in place, and with reasonable grounds for believing that theology in general is an activity which proceeds on the basis of a warrant, the nature of the specific warrants for theology and the different genres of theology that are called into existence by them can come more clearly into view. The contemporary question, posed by liberalistic culture, of the viability of theology in pluralistic contexts invites (or perhaps demands) an interpretation of the phenomenon of theology which can recognize theology's warrants and its relationship to the two impulses of religion and ideology. This entails an interpretation of theology in which a typology is proposed to differentiate the abstract notion of theology in general into a feature-laden spectrum of actual theologies. These individual theologies can then be placed according to their warrants in generic relationship through an ontology which is regionally explicit and not entirely sunk in the obscurity of reified ideology.

Traditionally, theology has belonged in a setting that was structured according to the teaching of a living, organized religion. Phenomenally, these settings have been diverse, but in structural terms, all the settings of traditional theology are reducible to one, namely, the world as conceived in light of the teaching of a given religion. Granted that any religion participates in the falling of its followers and theology is easily implicated in this falling, it is still true that traditional theology developed into an important aspect of the religious way of being in the world and continues to be thought of as such.

The fact of the matter appears to be that theology belongs also to the non-religious, ideological way of being in the world, though not in the same way as it does to the religious. For those who live within the horizons of their world in a way structured by a living, organized religion, there is the absolute confidence of absolute dependence and the tacit matter-of-factness of the world that comes with falling into a situation of this type. There is also an institutionalized agreement (maintained by ideology) on some basic things, such as the legitimacy of the religion itself within the culture (or sub-culture) and one or more culturally acceptable representations of the religion's general structure of significance-relationships; these come to presence as categories of self-understanding given by the religion. Bearing in mind that reified categories of self-understanding,

no matter what the source, are the substance of ideology (including "religious ideology"), and remembering that religion and ideology are ontologically unified, let us consider initially how a religion's logical categories of understanding in ensemble can be the basis of warrants for traditional kinds of theology, following the commonly accepted view that "(a) theology mediates between a religion and a culture."<sup>1</sup> When a sectarian agenda is set by a warrant for theology, what results can be either confessional theology or philosophical theology, depending upon how the categories of the discourse function. Because they are better established, we look at these two before analyzing how non-sectarian warrants function.

**Confessional theology** is charged by a standing mandate to preserve the religion's given complex of self/world in its absolute unity and to insure coherence in the natural projections of the community. Its functions are especially to illuminate and preserve the structure of significance-relationships against the ravages of absurdity and the experience of anxiety by claiming, or appropriating, the nothingness which continually draws beings into itself. This claim is made in the name of a divinity in recognition of that which proximally draws the religious person onward through existence in a way that is both meaningful and beyond meaning. As a way of being in the world, a religion logically entails the significance of the world as the condition of its own significance. But, as Heidegger notes, "Anxiety discloses an insignificance of the world; and this insignificance reveals the nullity of that with which one can concern oneself — or, in other words, the impossibility of projecting oneself upon a potentiality-for-being which belongs to existence and which is founded primarily upon one's objects of concern."<sup>2</sup> Religions, as present-at-hand, tread a fine line between necessity and irrelevance. For this reason, confessional theology takes its categories of understanding ultimately seriously.

By taking its pre-given categories of understanding ultimately seriously, confessional theology only appears to reify them to the ideological, or exoteric, consciousness. Confessional theology's warrant from religion essentially calls for a way of thinking which is vitally concerned with its original matrix in the mode of its absolute-ness. As a way of thinking, confessional theology is virtually self-sufficient; in its own terms, it is not pressured to examine or relativize its own foundations because those foundations are as secure and as true as the absolutely accepted primary categorizations codified in

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the religion which grounds it. As long as the general structure of significance-relationships represented by the religion retains the integrity of its self-evidence, there is no challenge to coherence except that of anxiety itself (which the religion seeks to appropriate by interpretation) which would redirect the eyes of faith from the reality of its own religiously pre-given conceptions to an explicitly alternative structure of significance-relationships, to the onto-logical status of the world itself as function of Dasein's own spatio-temporal horizons. This is to say that for confessional theology, the (tautological) understanding of its own understanding will always take precedence over all other interpretations. This is what Heidegger was advocating when he placed upon theology the responsibility for the nature of its own discourse and what Ayer was arguing against. The tension between these two thinkers is indicative of the tension between religion and ideology.

Confessional theology, as it appears essentially in our extrapolation from the ontology of the previous chapters and the working definition proposed above, is the seeking of understanding which occurs when Dasein finds itself, groundless, in the condition of a lack of understanding in the confrontation with nothingness. Because understanding can never attain satisfying completeness in the face of nothingness, confessional theology is granted an internal, logical justification for perpetual activity. In earlier times, that justification was claimed on the grounds that God revealed different things at different times, not an unthinkable position for theology grounded in narrative. Though the canon of a religion may be (declared) closed, the possibilities of its community of faith can never be factually closed until it comes to an end. As long as a community of faith exists, confessional theology has a role to play in the elucidation of the religious doctrine that binds the community and defines its general way.

Since doctrine is a phenomenon of institutionalized religious practice, confessional theology, as the explicit elucidation of doctrine, has a place in any community of faith that is characterized by the presence of normative, institutionalized religion. This would include virtually all traditional societies, where the institutionalized religion so suffuses daily life that doctrine, as a kind of cultural metalanguage, is factually interwoven with every understanding, even though no explicit codification may have occurred. It would also include the obvious cases of organized, bureaucratic religions in both tradition-