

SEMINAR ON THE TRINITY

A. OUR RETURN TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST IN THE SPIRIT

On Thursday David Coffey, professor of systematic theology at The Catholic Institute of Sydney, led the seminar participants in a discussion of "Our Return to God through Christ in the Spirit." Coffey's central thesis is that the Incarnation is brought about by the radical bestowal of the Holy Spirit by the Father (as God's love for the Son) on the humanity of Christ. In the unity of this one act of bestowal, Christ's humanity is created, sanctified, and drawn into unity of person with the Son who is the proper object of the Father's love in the immanent Trinity.

As possessed in all fullness by Christ, the Holy Spirit becomes the human love which the incarnate Son returns to the Father through his life and death. Since the Spirit is divine love incarnate in human love, Christ's return of Love to the Father (from whom the bestowal of Love originated) is the return of the Spirit of Christ. Reflection on the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbor leads us to appreciate the identity-in-distinction of Christ's return to the Father and Christ's gift of the Spirit which constitutes the church. As brothers and sisters of Christ through the reception of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ), we are drawn into the ambit of the activity of this same Spirit who is also the Spirit of the Father. The Father's creative and unitive love for Christ recreates, sanctifies, and draws us into union (but not "hypostatic" unity) with the Son.

Through the gift of the Spirit of Christ who is one with the Spirit of God, we become sons and daughters in the Son. The action of the Spirit of Christ is thus understood as the sacramental sign and cause of the activity of the Spirit of God. By the dual action of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ we are empowered to love God as our Father and one another as children of God and as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Coffey's trinitarian model calls for a retrieval of the biblical theme of Christ's anointing by the Spirit of God as the starting point for all reflection on the trinitarian mystery. Rather than reflecting on the ascending character of humanity's return to God in terms of the descending quality of the immanent processions, Coffey's theology articulates a thoroughgoing ascending Trinitarian theology. An ascending understanding of the immanent divine relations is suggested, says Coffey, in Augustine's "mutual love" theory of the Trinity. The Spirit is not simply the Love of the Lover for the Beloved, but the "Returned Love" of the Beloved for the Lover. Without the return there is no mutual love.

Members of the seminar noted the rich potential of Coffey's model for addressing such issues as the ontological constitution of both divine and human persons, the source of trinitarian unity, the transformation of nonhuman creation, the

relationship of Christ and the church, and the eschatological character of the gift of the Spirit.

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B. SOCIETY AND SPIRIT: A TRINITARIAN COSMOLOGY

Presenter: Joseph A. Bracken, Xavier University, Cincinnati.

In the Western tradition the point of departure for trinitarian doctrine is the unity of the divine nature. But we are also heirs of the Greek tradition in which the Father is the point of departure handing on the divine substance. In Leonardo Boff the point of departure is the communion of the three persons. He is not a tritheist because the very interrelatedness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute them as persons. Pannenberg, stimulated by the Stoic concept of Spirit, has introduced into trinitarian thought a metaphor from physics, namely, the field.

Would it not be useful to think of God's unity as a field? Field also offers the possibility of plurality; fields can exist within fields. Further, field can be applied to both God and creation. The field of divine life is inclusive of the field of creation. Hence three divine persons and their creatures occupy a common field, influencing one another's process of becoming. Or one can modify the concept of persons. They may be described as divine "energies." This seems justified because persons are also on a connected series of energies co-constituting the field of divine being and the field of creation. Palamite theology used the category of energies. But it must be remembered that energies are not just divine manifestations. They are not other than God itself.

Field is not a reductionist category. Individuals are highly complex fields. If one is asked to what Aristotelian category field in process theology corresponds, the answer is substance. If God initiates, the Son responds, the Spirit facilitates within the divine field. Field here allows continuity and diversification. In other thinkers there can be found a corresponding category. Martin Buber spoke of the I, the Thou and the In-Between (*Zwischen*). In using field one need not thereby opt for a trinitarian theology in which collectivity comes in second. The field is not prior to collectivity. Persons are co-constitutive. The persons only exist in their relationship. This is already found in the Thomist position. Here the person is the subsistent relationship.

The field metaphor can be shifted. One can think of three coextensive fields; or also one field, but also three coextensive, co-constitutive persons. Each person possesses the field in its entirety.

This seems to pose a problem for Process thought. How can God become if this model is used? The answer: the field grows. God is a qualitative growing field or society.

The Spirit has always been more of a problem than either the Father or the Son. There is less of a problem when the category of person is used for the Father and the Son. But the Spirit seems to be less person, because more generic, lacking the specificity of Father and Son. But in one framework the Spirit is perhaps more

person, because the Spirit is closer to activity. The Holy Spirit is the acting, energizing field.

The category of field provides real links with the absolute emptiness of Buddhist thought. In Buddhism this is articulated by the Rock Garden. The field is foregrounded in the Garden, while the individual elements are backgrounded.

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