

SEMINAR ON SPIRITUALITY

The first session of the seminar followed the conference theme, "Providence and Responsibility: The Divine and Human in History." Prudence Croke of Salve Regina College spoke on "*Solicitudo Rei Socialis*: Challenge to Contemporary Spirituality," and Susan Rakoczy of St. Joseph's Scholasticate, S.A. gave "Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Social Conversion." The second session continued with its ongoing work on method in spirituality. Drawing on her extensive work of translating and interpreting Catherine of Siena's writings, Suzanne Noffke of the University of Chicago focused on three cumulative methodological levels in the study of spirituality in paradigmatic historical persons. John A. McGrath of the University of Dayton gave the response.

Prudence Croke noted that *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* had received extensive economic criticism and response but little reflection on its spiritual dimension. Prudence detailed the situation in the world and in our country of poverty, injustice, violence, and oppression for the majority of the world's peoples. She claimed the encyclical calls for a spiritual response typified by affective conversion and identification with the kenotic Christ on the part of first world people. She drew on several schemas in developing her remarks. Mystical marriage in classical writers demonstrates a capacity in mystics for self-sacrifice for the good of others. James Fowler describes the religiously mature person as exhibiting a self-denying oneness for and in others, a social dimension to spirituality. She discussed Lonergan's theory of conversion emphasizing the moral and affective levels of conversion and developed the necessity of persons' allowing themselves to be touched by the suffering of the poor. She identified lack of maturity and of identifying with the self-emptying Christ as two causes of the failure to respond to poverty. She then highlighted several sections of the encyclical, especially parts four and five and challenged seminar participants to internalize the spiritual dimension of the encyclical.

Susan Rakoczy identified the experience of suffering as the point of intersection between God's love and providence and movement towards responsibility for the world. She developed this human response of compassion and social conversion through the lenses of two Christians from different historical and cultural contexts: the fourteenth century English anchoress, Julian of Norwich; and the South African minister, Allan Boesak. Susan showed the connection between Julian's contemplation of Christ in his sufferings and her response of compassion for her "even Christians." Being "oned" to Christ in love opens onto compassion for and with those Christ loves. Susan explored the writings of Boesak for a similar yet distinctly different link between personal religious experience and social justice. For the South African minister, social conversion is taken for granted. Yet for him the experience of suffering was ambiguous and full of mystery. Compassion is not always the outcome of suffering. It can create a crisis of faith. Boe-

sak discovered in his suffering that God was "brokenhearted" in this experience, with him in the fiery furnace of suffering on behalf of justice. Susan drew on Manas Buthelezi to differentiate between oppressive suffering (forced upon others as the result of violence) and redemptive suffering (suffering after the model of Jesus serving the liberation of self and others). Finally, she showed that in Boesak's case the experience of suffering on behalf of justice and peace issued in a deeper confrontation with religious questions.

In the second session, Suzanne Noffke developed three closely interrelated but distinct levels of methodological concern in the study of an historical figure: I. The study of the subject's personal spirituality; II. his or her expressed thought concerning spirituality; or III. the application of his or her example and teaching to contemporary spirituality. For each of these levels Suzanne identified its methodological function, objective, and appropriate sources for the study of this figure. Level I is the foundation for levels II and III and is the work of the biographer whose emphasis is spirituality. Sources are autobiographical, hagiographical, documentation contemporary to the figure, influential texts, and the cultural, religious milieu of the subject. Level II attempts to understand what the subject said about the spiritual life. Its function is to interpret what the text(s) says and means itself or brings the text into conversation with values and insights extrinsic to the text. This is the level of the historian of spirituality or the theologian who consults the saint. Sources are the saint's writings, reports of the subject's teaching, the subject's sources, etc. Level III relies on all of levels I and II often distilled through the work of other scholars. Its function is pastoral and theological, mediating what is of greatest benefit for today. A general hermeneutical theory is presumed as background to the distinctions among each of the levels as Suzanne described them. She exemplified each of these levels with lively facts and questions raised by her study of Catherine of Siena.

John McGrath ably responded to Suzanne's presentation by commending her analysis, amplifying it with reference to Lonergan's *Method in Theology* and David Tracy's *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, and reading two recent volumes in the Paulist Press Classics in Western Spirituality Series with a view to identifying the levels involved. John also raised questions about the need to compare a subject's spirituality and teaching with the spiritualities in Scripture and the tradition. He also challenged seminar participants to make sense of our own age as a prior step to engaging an historical figure and asked us to consider how one evaluates the effect of the nonrational on the subject's thoughts and actions. A lively discussion ensued primarily focusing on the complexity of understanding contemporary paradigmatic figures for whom we have more information and who may exhibit considerable discrepancy between how they live and what they might say about it.

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